

# ELLERY QUEEN'S 1961 ANTHOLOGY

\$1.00

Philip Wylie  
Agatha Christie  
Quentin Reynolds  
Erle Stanley Gardner  
Frances & Richard Lockridge  
John Dickson Carr  
Mignon G. Eberhart  
Michael Gilbert  
Charlotte Armstrong  
Lord Dunsany  
Rex Stout  
Georges Simenon  
Gerald Kersh  
Roy Vickers  
Peter B. Kyne  
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André Maurois  
George Harmon Coxe  
Helen Simpson  
Ellery Queen  
Budd Schulberg  
Hugh Pentecost

3 SHORT NOVELS  
20 SHORT STORIES

Who's Who  
Whodunits

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# ELLERY QUEEN'S 1961 ANTHOLOGY

*Edited by* ELLERY QUEEN

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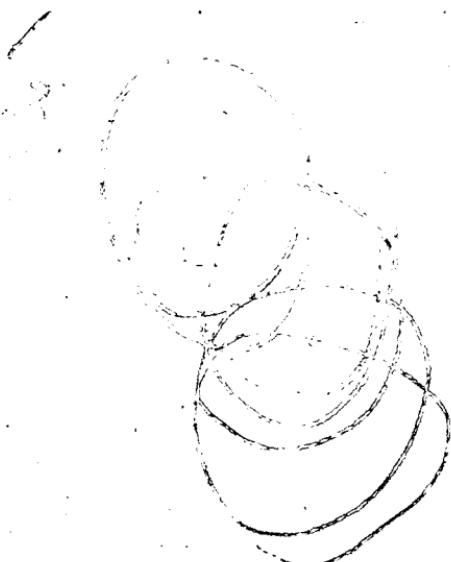
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## Editors' Note

Dear Reader:

When we offered you ELLERY QUEEN's 1960 ANTHOLOGY late last year, we hoped it might prove the first in a series of annuals. Critical response was all that any editor could possibly expect. For example, Anthony Boucher said in *The New York Times*: "Despite Queen's many earlier collections, there are still a phenomenal number of good and neglected stories in the files of *EQMM*, as this volume copiously demonstrates." James Sandoe wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune*: "excellent assembly . . . rich and inexpensive parcel." And Sergeant Cuff's judgment in *Saturday Review* was: "fine bedside-fireside-roadside companion, which is to date the year's topside bargain."

But equally important was the response from readers. We received so many enthusiastic letters that we are now encouraged to go ahead with a planned series.

Last year, you will recall, we settled on two clear and definitive policies. These two editorial polestars remain our fixed guides for the new anthology. First, every story in the 1961 ANTHOLOGY again meets the twin

standards of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—high quality or high professionalism of writing, and superior originality or superior craftsmanship of plotting. Second, no story in this one-volume mystery library has ever appeared in any anthology previously edited by Ellery Queen.

So, once again, we offer you (to quote from James Sandoe's description of last year's anthology) a "list of contributors that is approximately a roster of the most celebrated of modern mystery writers"—although we hasten to point out that of last year's 23 contributors only 10 are repeated in this year's famous names. Yet your continued reading pleasure is assured—for this year's anthology is another Celebrity Register, chock-full o' crime, another royal flush of Queen's Aces, Kings—and Knaves.

The next page is a magic door.

Open it with bated breath.

It will lead you into a fabulous room, full of ferrets and felons, in a treasure house of excitement and suspense worth their weight in blood-red rubies . . .

ELLERY QUEEN

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Philip Wylie

## Ten Thousand Blunt Instruments

*An unusual background dominates this story—the action occurs in the halls and galleries of the Museum of Natural History in New York, among the gigantic skeletons of Man's remote ancestors. There are monsters in this exciting short novel, and perhaps the dead ones are the most ominous.*

BECAUSE SHE HAD NO PATIENCE with what she regarded as a weakness in herself, she went into the big room. A tolerance for weakness—for timidity, especially—should be reserved for other people, Gail thought. There wasn't anything new about her phobia. She'd felt it when she was a kid—on her first trip to a museum. She had felt it in college when her geology class went to Belvidere Hall to inspect the fossils. She felt it now.

Outside, the early winter afternoon was dim with foreknowledge of night. There was light, ample in its way, in the gigantic chambers of the American Museum of Natural History. But the electricity threw shadows. And the windows let in a diffusion of darkness, a murk that emphasized the wrong things; made the reassuring ones indefinite.

Gail entered the Jurassic Hall as if she were pushing against a barrier, and stared willfully at the monstrous skeletons of the dinosaurs. Her skin prickled. Her mouth was a little dry. She tried

hard to analyze the cause of this panicky, meaningless sensation: the bones had no flesh; eyes did not roll in the bowl-sized sockets; these horns, teeth, jaws, and articulated vertebrae had been dead—in the earth—for millions and millions of years. Perhaps that was the incubus: the millions of years.

"Hello, beautiful!"

The voice did not startle Gail. Rather, it steadied her. It made her remember that people—men and women and children—were moving calmly through the haunted chamber of dinosaurs. The corners of her lips twitched. She turned. It was a boy in the uniform of the Army Air Force. Second 'looie. He had a nice, Middle-Western face—open and tanned. Or maybe, she thought, it was the voice, not the face, that had prairies in it.

"Mashing is undignified," Gail said, "It's not for officers."

He grinned. "Kind of dead in here." It was kind of dead. Horribly dead. Thirty-million-years dead. Gail nodded.

"I thought—maybe—you'd like to go to a livelier place. Where I've been the last six months, blondes—green-eyed ones—are scarce."

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant. But in about ten minutes I'm due back at work upstairs."

"You mean you work in this mausoleum?" He didn't believe her.

"In it," she said. "Not for it. I work for the War Department. They send us up here, occasionally, to find out things. I'm a researcher."

"Oh." He thought it over. "Well, in that case, far be it for me to interfere. I don't suppose—later on—?"

"I'm putting in day and night on this assignment, Lieutenant. Sorry. And I haven't any blonde friends—with or without green eyes. I don't know anybody at all in New York."

He sighed exaggeratedly. "Me, either. Well—win the war, sister!"

The young woman's eyes were bright, a shade overbright. They fastened on the wings spread proudly on the boy's breast. "You win it, Lieutenant! Good luck—and good hunting, when the time comes!"

They separated, each feeling that New York was a little less huge and inhospitable.

She walked up the broad stairs, beyond the last floor on which the public was admitted. The quality of light changed and its quantity diminished as she entered a shabby

interior corridor along which were offices of some of the executives and scientists of the Museum. At a door marked, "Dr. Horace Jordan, Zoology," she paused and braced herself again—but not with fear, this time. She was amused, wistful, and perhaps a trifle maternal. She turned the time-stained knob.

Dr. Jordan was bent over his desk as usual. And, as usual, maps were spread out upon it and the green-shaded droplight was burning. His thin, sensitive face was concentrated, but the squeak of the door lifted it. He smiled politely, but his eyes, which were brown and luminous, had no extra shimmer of welcome for her. "'Afternoon, Miss Vincerit."

"I missed you yesterday." Gail hung her coat and umbrella on the hatrack. To do so, she had to walk around three tables which were a crowded chaos of books, specimen jars, rolled maps, bones, piled photographs, and dusty collecting cases. Dr. Jordan's office, like so much of the Museum, was big, venerable, and dark.

He watched her. "I went over to Jersey. My sister's place. I'd left a lot of junk in her cellar—junk from the African trip I made in '38. I got out some notes, and last night, at home, I sketched this map for you. The country beyond Ujiji."

*The country beyond Ujiji.* It was a romantic phrase. And there was, Gail thought, a good deal of romance in Dr. Jordan and his life

even though he hid it behind a scientific manner only moderately tempered by his use of slang. She knew that, as far as she was concerned, she would gladly put down all her chips if he gave even half a sign of noticing that she was a girl—as well as a researcher. But he did.

It had been that way for Gail almost from the moment she had spotted him, months ago, standing uncertainly in the colonel's office in the War Department in Washington. At that time, she had known only that he was a famed zoologist, a formidable hunter, an authority on vast stretches of the Dark Continent, and a well-born New Yorker—things everybody knew. But she found out afterward that he was a great deal more than she admired in men: shy but resourceful, modest but willing to take responsibility, reticent about himself but a fascinating talker on a myriad of other subjects. And she had liked his looks, his intentness, the attention he paid to what was said, his smile, which was the shy kind, too, but merry, and always waiting to be evoked.

"In *Who's Who*," Gail once said to a girlfriend, "his biography sounds tough and dashing; but he's one of the gentlest people you ever met."

Looking at him now, Gail felt that, and more. She could fall in love. He couldn't, probably. He was an habitual bachelor. He was in

love with his absorbing and sometimes dangerous work. He wasn't a ladies' man. He didn't even like her, especially. He was always a little impatient, as if he hoped her assignment would soon end and he could return to his own labors.

"This"—he pointed with a fountain pen—"is what I was talking about. I marked the altitude here. You can see—the valley's flat for about forty miles. You could put plenty of airports there—which, I take it, is what the War Department is coyly interested in."

Gail flushed slightly. "It's on the new flyway for India—"

"Exactly. It's grass—easy to clear. Hard ground. Pinsch and Felton were there in '28 and I queried them. They say the drainage is superb and the rainy season short. Ten months of ideal visibility. A road could be pushed through from Ujiji. The army engineers who built the Alaska Highway, for instance, would think any such chore was a cinch. No tsetse flies here, either. I checked that with Ralston. I'd say, in all the parts of Africa I know, this would make the best permanent installation for air transports and for military ferrying."

Gail peered. "Railroad's been moved, up by Ujiji."

"Lake level changed. Yeah. Condition of the railroad is only fair. But good enough."

"The War Department will be grateful," the girl said.

"The War Department," Dr. Jordan replied, sitting up straight and grinning a little, "could have gotten all this and much more information a great many years ago, without bothering a busy scientist who is in the middle of a job and who has been moved by sheer patriotism to consider his favorite stretch of country in terms of military airports."

"The Department didn't have the funds years ago," Gail replied defensively.

"It wouldn't have cost anything. It was all on file."

"Where?"

"In Berlin." He chuckled.

"Oh. How do you know?"

"Because the Germans have been getting ready for this war a long time. Only a few miracles like the Battle of Britain, the Russians, and the victory in Africa, have kept all this territory"—he pointed to the map—"from becoming an Axis airport on a main Axis flyway. They were there surveying and inspecting in '38 when I was."

"I'd better hear more about that." Gail hurried to the small, tidy desk which had been assigned to her. She picked up a notebook and some pencils, and came back to sit beside the zoologist. "Colonel Frain'll want to give the information to G-2."

He yawned. "Okay. But it's just a few years late. When I was there last time hunting my zebras and so on, this area had two other parties

in it. They claimed to be Boers. Maybe they were Boers. I dunno. But I do know that they pretended to be hunting game and they had more scientific equipment than guns, by ten times. And one of them had a habit of humming the *Horst Wessel Song* when he was preoccupied. So they were Nazi Boers—if they were Afrikanders at all. They were doubtless doing, not very obviously, some leg work for the German geopolitician. They quarried around, too, and left the district governor with the impression that they'd found oil-bearing shale. They think a long way ahead, those Nazis."

"The War Department'll appreciate that too, Dr. Jordan."

His eyes, brown, steady, but almost always abstracted, showed a brief and surprising trace of anger. "Sure. Now. But in '38, when I went to Washington and tried to tell 'em our potential enemies were already preparing to carve up Africa, they booted me out of the place. Said I was a nut."

"Yes. We have been very blind in this country," Gail said soberly.

"Oh, well," He shrugged. "Let's get on with the work. The sooner—" He stopped.

"The sooner we do, the sooner you won't have a lady researcher nagging you," Gail smiled.

He said, "Exactly." He described the "Boers" who had been advance agents of Greater Germany.

Gail finally made herself stop

thinking that a girl could fall in love with a man like that, if he were just a little less like that. A little more human. The afternoon steeped itself in successive shades of darkness until, some time after the closing bells had sounded on the floors below, it was night.

"I've got a dinner date," Dr. Jordan said.

"I'm going to slip out later."

"Then you'll be back?"

"Yes. If I may, I'll copy those notebooks you brought from Jersey."

"Sure. Anything. I'll be in later, myself. But I'd like to do my own work for a while, if you don't mind."

She smiled. "Okay. The War Department'll give you a recess, Doctor. . . ."

When she returned from her solitary supper her footsteps echoed through the great, darkened halls. Some were open. Metal gates had been pulled across the entrances of others. The stone floors rang faintly with the pacing of the guards. In limitless penumbras she could see curled mastodon tusks and leg bones as high as herself. She shivered, and hurried toward the higher floors.

Lights shone in some of the offices. Old Dr. Weber was working with his door open. Fat Dr. Pinsch and fatuous Dr. Felton, the geologists, were talking earnestly in the latter's room. At the far end of the immense corridor Gail could see

the gaunt frame of Dr. Beal as she fumbled with her key. Gail had left the light on in Dr. Jordan's place, not because she was afraid of falling over the objects in it, but just because she was afraid, always, at night in the old building.

A few big flakes of snow had left drops of water on the collar of her coat. She shook them off and went to work under the truncated cone of yellow that fell downward from the green shade.

An hour later Dr. Jordan walked briskly down the hall. He looked, Gail thought, positively jaunty. But the personality which had been his at his "dinner date" seemed to melt as he entered his office. "Hard at it, I see," he said. Without waiting for an answer, he stripped off his coat, put on an apron, and began to rummage through a bone heap on one of the far tables.

Another person, she thought, might have told her about the dinner. She went on copying, quietly. At ten o'clock, or thereabouts, he crossed the room. "Going to slip down to Akeley Hall and check some data."

She didn't notice how long he was absent. When he came back he made a few jottings on a pad; then he put on his coat and hat. "Don't stay all night," he smiled. "I must admit, you're the hardest-working female I ever knew! But they tell me that around three A.M. the dinosaurs start walking."

It was a purely accidental state-

ment, meant as a joke, but she felt her flesh crawl. "I'll quit in a little while, now."

He nodded and said, "Good night, Miss V."

She worked on for a while, until a voice came through the door, which Dr. Jordan had left open. "Hello, bright eyes!"

Gail looked up and laughed. "Hello, Henry."

Henry Grant, the man standing in the doorway, was young, thin, and very blond. Like so many of the men who worked in the Museum, he seemed overzealous and underfed. He was a technician whom she had met soon after reporting for work—a boy from the Middle West—and, in a casually amiable way, he had been doing his best to improve his acquaintance with the girl.

"I'm busy," she said.

"That excuse is going to wear out, some day. I'm going home. I stopped by to see if you'd let me take you—and have a snack on the way."

She shook her head. "Not ready yet, thanks. Try again."

"Don't think I won't, lady! Getting along all right?"

"Well enough. I have to interview everybody in the place who's ever been in Africa, just about."

He laughed. "That's a pretty big job. You'd better change your mind and come along."

"Not tonight, thanks."

"Okay. 'Night."

She rose, when his footsteps had receded, and pushed the door shut.

He hadn't been gone long when there was a knock. Gail finished a sentence, and said, "Come in! Oh . . . Dr. Weber . . . Dr. Jordan's left for home."

Dr. Weber, against the light filtered from the hall, seemed more ancient, frail, and other-worldly than any of the great institution's staff. His thin, silvery hair floated above his gnome-like head; his eyes, bird-brilliant, changed from an expression of keen anticipation to one of childish disappointment. He held a coffee can, rusted so that the label was blurred, in both hands. "I thought I saw him a little while ago," he said uncertainly. "Down in Akeley Hall: I was in the Gallery, looking at the lesser koodoos."

"He was there," Gail answered. "But he's gone."

"Marvelous exhibit," the old man went on. "They all are. I like to look at them at night when there's nobody around. It reminds me of the days when I worked in the field myself."

Gail felt a thrust of impatience at age, at the thoughtlessness of age and its minute preoccupation with its own affairs. But she knew that Dr. Jordan liked the old gentleman and that his earlier days, also, had been excitingly romantic—from the scientific standpoint. She was tired, "I like to look at the koodoos, too—and the lions and tigers and the elands—everything."

He came into the office. She saw, then, that the weight of the coffee can was considerable for its size. Dr. Weber's arms were shaking.

"Why don't you set it down?"

"Yes. Yes, I will. You don't know my home phone number?"

"Dr. Jordan's? I think it's in the book."

"M-m-m." He put the can on the desk beside the maps. "Still—it will keep, I suppose. I took care of things. I wonder how much young Horace knows about mineralogy?"

Dr. Weber tipped the coffee can. She could see then that it was full of glittering, yellowish crystals, the size of Brazil nuts.

"I wonder," he repeated. "This is rock he brought me from Africa. Said it was curious and so he chipped me some samples. That's like the boy. Thoughtful, always. Impulsive, too. Because it's really a very common substance. Quartz.  $\text{SiO}_2$ —that is, with a mineral impurity that gives it the yellow cast. He'd kept it in storage some place, he said, until yesterday. Meant to bring it to me before."

He took a short pipe from his pocket. Its bowl had been burned down, so that it was irregular. She noticed his hands were shaking.

"I wish Horace were here," he continued, fingering the pipe. "Because I've really got to know—!"

"Know what?"

"Well—how much *he* knows about minerals. I'll tell you. He wanted an analysis. Well, we'll give

him one. Be a joke on him if he really thought this stuff was anything—anything novel. Got a sheet of paper?"

She gave one to him. Chuckling, he wrote on it in large characters, " $\text{SiO}_2$ ." He put the paper on the doctor's desk and the can of rocks on the paper. He said, "Are you interested in minerals?"

"I'm afraid I don't know much about them."

"Pity." The old man walked toward the door. "Beautiful things, some of them," he said.

She heard his feet move slowly down the hall. She tried to return to her work. But after twenty or thirty minutes of effort she decided she was too weary. She put on her coat and her pert hat and went down the long, forbidding corridor. She rang for an elevator, and Ivers, one of the guards, finally came up in it.

Out on Central Park West it was cold and windy. The trees across the thoroughfare were a shrieking chorus, against the dimmed-out backdrop of the buildings on Fifth Avenue, beyond the Park. She caught a bus and rode chillily to the small mid-town hotel where her expense allowance maintained her in modest comfort.

Gail Vincent was the last innocent person to see Dr. Weber alive.

His "disappearance," although noted on the following day, was the occasion for only minor alarm. To-

ward the end of a morning that had been busy for Gail and Dr. Jordan, they were interrupted by the Museum's vice-director, Dr. Thomas Evans. Unlike many of the scientists attached to the institution, Dr. Evans was well groomed and worldly, a fairly tall man with large, intelligent gray eyes and a taste in tweeds. He came in smilingly, apologized for disturbing them, asked Gail if the Museum was serving the War Department well, and plumped himself a moment over her enthusiastic reply. Then he said he was "somewhat concerned."

He sat down on a table edge and swung his legs. "We can't find old Paul Weber. His housekeeper phoned that he didn't come home last night. In the old days you might expect that Weber had bounded off to Tibet and had forgotten to tell us. But he's been sticking to routine for a good many years. Under the circumstances, I worry about him."

"He was here last night," Gail said. She told the vice-director about the call.

Evans turned to Jordan. "Were you in Akeley Hall? Did you see him?"

"I was down on the main floor, counting stripes on zebra legs. There was somebody up on the gallery. I saw a light on in—"

"He said the lesser koodoos," Gail said.

Dr. Jordan nodded. "About that

spot." He smiled a little. "Old Paul loved to saunter around the Museum at night. Of course, he concentrated on the Hall of Gems. It was his own creation, somewhat, wasn't it?"

The vice-director nodded again. "What about this business of the can full of quartz?"

"Right behind you."

Evans tipped the can, and the collection of yellowish crystals clattered on the table top.

Dr. Jordan picked up the sheet of paper on which was lettered, "SiO<sub>2</sub>." He showed it to Evans. "This is Paul's notion of a joke, I guess. I saw the stuff in an outcrop —up Ujiji way. Being a zoologist, not a specialist in minerals, I had a vague idea it might be interesting, and I thought of Paul, so I hammered some off and put it in this can. When I came back, with a big collection of animal specimens, I forgot all about these stones. They got sent over to my sister's place in Jersey and stored, and I came across them only day before yesterday; so I lugged 'em in to the Museum. SiO<sub>2</sub> means plain quartz, which was Paul's gentle way of telling me I had been wasting my time."

Dr. Evans said, "Anything to add, Miss Vincent?"

"Well, yes and no. He was terribly anxious to get in touch with Dr. Jordan last night. He considered phoning him at home. Then, for some reason, he decided not to. He said it would keep, or some-

thing of the sort. He seemed—well—excited."

Jordan shook his head. "Haven't the faintest idea why the old boy would be excited. Unless this stuff is special, after all."

"I'll have it looked at." Evans began scooping it into the can. "Meanwhile, we're running through the usual routine. Hospitals, and so on. The thing that disturbs me most is that he apparently didn't leave the building last night."

Dr. Evans added, "None of the guards let him out. Of course, it's possible that he went out unseen. There was a meeting here—a lecture—until after eleven. He might have gone out with the people who attended."

Dr. Jordan said quietly, "You've started a search here?"

"Naturally." Dr. Evans walked to the door. "I'll keep you informed. Meantime, I'd prefer that this remained confidential. No use setting up a hue and cry over what may prove to be, at worst, the normal sort of tragedy that overcomes us all in the end. I called on you two because Henry Grant told me he'd seen Paul turn in here yesterday evening."

Dr. Jordan sighed. "Golly, I hope nothing's gone wrong. That's a noble old boy, Evans. Wish we had more of 'em in this world. I owe Weber pretty nearly everything I am and do." He explained, casually, for Gail's benefit: "He was a

friend of my father's. Got me interested in nature when I was a kid. Took me on trips. Took me camping. Saw what was just a kid's interest in living things, and made the most of it. Slanted me toward biology. And chaperoned me into this berth when I'd taken my degrees. He's one hell of a nice old gent!"

"He is," Evans agreed. "And I'd hate to have anything happen to Paul, myself. For that reason. And for the Museum, too. I don't like inexplicable events in my organization. . . . You don't remember anything else, Miss Vincent?"

Gail said she was afraid not. Paul Weber had walked away from the office at some time close to eleven o'clock. That was all she knew.

She and Dr. Jordan went back to work.

On the following morning, Thursday, they learned that the Bureau of Missing Persons had been notified. The matter rested there for the entire day. By then, word of the disappearance of the mineralogist was spreading via the grapevine that exists wherever there are human beings. An exhaustive search for the old man, performed by the guards and other employees, had yielded nothing whatever. He had been in the hall outside the office where Gail worked at some time near eleven, and then he had vanished. . . .

He might not have been found

for months. As it happened, chance gave an entirely new face to the problem of the missing man. At a quarter of six, on that second day of his absence, Gail and Dr. Jordan were hurrying to finish up a report on edible game in a place called Nobanzi.

The afternoon had become night because of heavy overcast. A few snowflakes were falling and the wind was on the increase. Most of the Museum staff had left.

Suddenly, the low hurried dictation of the zoologist was broken by a sound in the hall. It was a gasping groan, audible because their door was ajar. After it came dead silence.

Jordan's pencil stopped on a page of his notes. "What's that?"

Gail, transfixed for an instant, rose and rushed to the door. At first she thought the long corridor was empty. Then she saw the figure of a man, a hundred feet away, leaning against the wall. She ran toward him, followed by Jordan. He passed her before they reached the leaning man, and said loudly, "Good lord, Taylor! What's the matter?"

Taylor was short and portly and bald. He had turned as pale as paper. In the muddy light that suffused the corridor, a diamond dust of perspiration glinted on his cheeks, his brow, and his bald head. He merely pointed a shuddering finger in a rubber glove.

The object at which he pointed

was a long, waist-high box, painted a battleship gray. There were five or six such boxes in the corridor, and Gail had noticed them before, but only casually. The hand-lugs of this box had been turned, and its lid removed. It was brimful of an opaque, brownish liquid from which rose a reek of carbolic. Not a box, then, but a tank. A tank filled with preservative.

Gail had a horrible hunch, and so did Dr. Jordan. His face also paled and grew tense. He cast his eyes about in the passageway, stepped to a heap of shelving, picked up one of the boards and began to stir the dark fluid. Something stuck briefly above the surface—a huge hand, covered with fur. Gail gasped.

"Gorilla," Jordan said sharply. He prodded again. He lifted above the liquid, for a mere split second, another object. There was no mistaking the dripping awfulness of it. He left it fall back.

He turned to Gail. "You okay?" She gathered herself. "Yes."

"Take Taylor into my office. I'll go for Evans." He addressed the baldheaded man. "You've had a bad shock, Taylor. Go into my room and sit down."

Dr. Jordan was very calm. Very collected. He kept his lips firm. He was thinking—thinking swiftly. He wasn't afraid. But he had room for emotion, and he expressed just a little of it: "That—that"—he gestured at the tank—"that old man

was my best friend, in a way. I—I loved the old guy! And whoever has done this to him is going to pay for it. I am going to make him pay!"

Gail knew that he would if it was humanly possible. She thought that she wouldn't want him to feel any other way about it. He was brimming over with a decent and bitter passion. She glanced at Taylor and back toward Dr. Jordan. He was running up the hall.

Gail took the limp scientist by the elbow and led him along to Dr. Jordan's door. No one else had as yet appeared in the hall. Gail put Mr. Taylor in a chair and went back to make sure of that fact. Down the long passage she could see the open tank. And then, far beyond, a door closed. Martha Beal, the biologist, walked toward Gail without seeing her, turned at a side passage, and vanished.

Gail closed Dr. Jordan's door. She poured a glass of water for Taylor.

"I'll be all right," he said. "I was just terrifically startled."

"Of course."

Minutes passed. She heard Evans and Jordan walk past—and walk past again, later, in the opposite direction. Under her ministrations, Taylor was beginning to recover.

Finally, the two men came in. Evans was haggard. Dr. Jordan seemed more abstracted than usual. But he said, "Still okay, Miss Vincent?" with the trace of a smile.

"Yes. And Mr. Taylor's better, I believe."

Taylor unfolded a clean handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

Evans lighted a cigarette with a wavering match. "This," he said nervously, "is a pretty terrible thing! It'll make headlines. It'll reflect all sorts of things—on me! A museum should house science, sense—" He realized how incoherent he sounded and made an effort to control himself. "Well, Taylor, what happened? How come you were poking into that tank?"

"I was doing an article on comparative anatomy. Anthropoids. There were a couple of points about gorillas I wanted to check, and I knew we had this one up here. I phoned Shollt for permission, but he'd gone. I felt sure he wouldn't object, so I simply came up, opened the tank, and reached in. I got"—he broke off and drew a long breath—"what Jordan did. I suppose you observed"—his voice rose as he addressed Jordan alone—"that there was clear evidence of a hard blow on the head?"

"We've phoned for the police," Evans said heavily. "That's all we can do for the moment. They'll want to question you, Taylor, first, no doubt. You'd better pull yourself together for it. I, naturally, will explain that what you did was mere routine. Quite all right." He dropped suddenly into one of the desk chairs. "But who on earth would murder Paul Weber?"

"The police," Jordan said softly, "will want to know who *could have*. I mean," he continued, "who was here the night Paul vanished? You were in your office, Evans. I was. Gail Vincent, here. I saw old Pinsch around that night when Weber disappeared. Felton, too, of course. They're inseparable. Henry Grant looked in here. So there's Grant—"

"That's futile speculation." Evans stopped studying his own thoughts. "There was a lecture that night, remember? A hundred-odd people attended. Tickets were a cinch to get hold of. Anybody who came to the lecture could have sneaked out, ducked the guards, and hidden around to waylay Paul Weber."

"Point is," Jordan answered, "could and would just 'anybody' have known we had preservative in these tanks and where they are and how to get into them—let alone how to transport a body to them?"

The talk went on. A police car wailed its approach out on the cold street. Dr. Evans went to meet the men, and brought back a sandy-haired, blue-eyed man of middle age.

"This," the vice-director said, "is Lieutenant Grove . . . Dr. Jordan —Mr. Taylor—Miss Vincent, from Washington."

Lieutenant Grove let his eyes examine each of the three. Then he got out a cigar, bit it, lighted it, and said, "All right. Shoot."

They told him, in turn, all they knew about Paul Weber's activities on the presumptive night of his murder. Grove listened carefully. At last he said, "I think, Dr. Evans, we'll have to begin with the usual methods. Comb the place. Try to find the weapon of assault. Try to find, if possible, the exact place where he was attacked—"

Evans stared at the officer. "You'd be able to clean up that job in about ten years."

The policeman frowned. "My boys on Homicide are trained—"

"I'm not impugning them. I simply mean that the enormousness of the plan you outline hasn't occurred to you. The weapon, for example. I'd say—and I imagine the casts of the wound will bear me out—that it was the usual blunt instrument. Curved, but not round. The skull fracture is plain. Curved, like a chair arm—like the surface of a mastodon rib. At a guess, there are ten thousand such blunt instruments in the Museum."

"As to the scene: Weber liked to roam the Museum at night. It's fairly well guarded and most of the exhibition halls are closed off with gates. But keys could be stolen—manufactured. The guards could be dodged. On this floor, the fifth, there are offices and labs. On the sixth, more labs, the department of experimental biology. There's a big basement with a cafeteria, machine shop, paint shop, carpentry shop, restrooms, nurses' rooms, the heat-

ing plant, and a pipe maze nobody understands except the man in charge.

"There are various staircases and many elevators—one that'll carry whole elephants. Has to be. The four floors under this are exhibits—thirteen of the total twenty-three acres of floor space, Lieutenant! And then there are some higher rooms, and the building interconnects in such a way that you can get from one part to most any other by way of the roof. I've been here, myself, for twenty-two years, and I'd say, at a guess, that there's a good ten per cent of the floor space here that I don't know a thing about! So, you see—"

Grove whistled softly. "All right. I'm convinced. We'll just have to do the best we can. Now . . . on the night Weber disappeared—Tuesday—the following people are known to have been here." He consulted a memorandum book. "You, Dr. Evans. You, Jordan. Taylor—you weren't here? You, Miss Vincent. Felton and Pinsch, geologists, Henry Grant, a technician. Martha Beal, biologist. A medical man named Garrison Lombardo. The guards. From what I've gathered, I take it you're all surprised that Dr. Weber was murdered."

It was, oddly enough, Taylor who first answered. "Astonished. He has spent his life here. Privately wealthy, and sometimes eccentric. Opinionated and possessed of a temper, yes. But a magnificent sci-

entist. He's a widower—has been for a decade. No children. The shocking part of this whole business is that—well, Paul Weber simply wasn't the kind of man who—who gets—"

"—who gets murdered?" Grove finished.

"Yes."

"In an individual case," the lieutenant said, "you never know what the type is until the thing's done. *Maybe* Weber hadn't an enemy, but *somebody* hit him with something, and hid him away in a gorilla storage tank, where—"

"Weber did have enemies, of sorts," Evans said uncertainly.

The policeman turned. "Who?"

Dr. Evans frowned. "I am not making accusations, you understand. Simply telling facts. In a professional way, Pinsch and Felton were bitter enemies of Weber. It began—oh—before my time. Maybe a quarter of a century ago, when Pinsch and Felton were young men. They quarreled about the manner of the formation of the Atlas Mountains—"

"Ye gods!" The man from the Homicide Squad was disgusted. "We can't start checking back on old technical feuds!"

"This was different. It got into a lot of scientific journals. In the end, old Paul Weber more or less won the argument. Only, by the time he won, he was so sore at Pinsch and Felton he took pains to try to show them up as fools. Then

they had a battle in the newspapers about water-supply sources for New York City. That was in the nineteen-teens. It was a geological argument, but it ended up with Pinsch swinging on Weber at a mass meeting; and Weber—he was in his early fifties and wiry—swung back and knocked Pinsch off the platform.

"Later they argued over the air-carriage of loess from the Gobi Desert and a lot of other topics. Felton sued Weber, once, for libel. Weber sued Pinsch, once, for slander. The thing has calmed down in the last decade, although they seldom speak and always take pains, when referring to each other in monographs, to use the most slurring terms that the form permits."

"Felton and Pinsch," supplemented Jordan, "are a fairly ornery pair. You never know how deep that sort of thing goes, either. Weber may have been up to some new insult or trick—may even have wanted to rope me in on it. I never cared especially for the two geologists, and the old boy knew it."

"I'll see them," Grove said thoughtfully, "and take you along, Dr. Evans."

The vice-director nodded. "One more person ought to be considered."

"I thought of her, too," Jordan murmured.

"Martha Beal. She and Weber were in love a long time ago. Engaged to be married. She was his

technical assistant, one of the first women to be employed in that capacity here. The engagement broke off overnight, nobody ever knew why, and she moved to another department. Ever since, she's hated old Weber. Martha Beal is a very intelligent, shrewd, hard-working woman. She might have cracked—"

"Easily," the lieutenant agreed. "She'll be number three on my list." He turned to the vice-director. "I'm going to have to have somebody here, Doctor, as a liaison between me and my men and you and your staff. Somebody who knows the Museum and the personnel and can be trusted."

Evans smiled a little. "Jordan?" The zoologist looked at Gail. "I've already been deputized to the U. S. Government."

Gail said, "I suspect that as soon as my colonel reads the papers he'll order me back to Washington."

"Which," said Lieutenant Grove, "in view of your importance as a witness, the New York Police Department might oppose."

Evans smiled more openly. "In which case, Jordan—"

"In which case, all right! I loved old Paul. I'll like finding whoever did that to him!"

The police officer walked to the door, where he stopped and turned. "Incidentally, what is your work, Jordan? What, for instance, were you doing down there on the main floor of Akeley Hall night before last?"

Jordan's eyes flickered. "I was standing in front of a stuffed Hippotigris with a flashlight. I was making a comparison of the leg-stripe patterns on the *Equus burchelli* and the *greyi*."

Lieutenant Grove stared, and then snorted. "This is a fine job for a cop!"

Evans opened the door wider. "Jordan's talking about zebras. Come on, Lieutenant Taylor? Coming?"

When they had gone Dr. Jordan creaked back his desk chair and looked thoughtful. "Where do we start?"

"Where do *you* start?" Gail smiled a little. "I never had anything to do with crime."

"You're a researcher, a gal with scientific training. You've been G-2-ed, and FBI-ed. That lieutenant from Homicide—Grove—won't ever get anything out of this."

"I wouldn't be sure."

"He won't. He's a good fellow, and bright, too. But he isn't a scientist. This business goes back to obscure things that happened long ago. It involves people, ideas, situations that Grove doesn't know anything about. No police officer does. It involves a knowledge of the Museum. For instance nobody would dare transport Paul's body to this floor late at night. It would be too conspicuous; somebody might be working here."

"The body had to be carried up here at a time and in a way which

wouldn't be noticed. And there's one good way—those zinc-covered roller tables we use to carry big specimens. We wheel them around continually. We cover them with sheets so as not to discomfit the visitors. Now, pretty nearly anybody could roll such a load into an elevator, roll it off on this floor, and wait his chance to open the gorilla tank and put the body in."

"The lieutenant wouldn't understand that. He'd think we would remember, because, in his mind, the rolling table would have a human corpse on it. But, in ours, the business is normal. See what I mean?"

"Of course." Gail thought a moment. "If he was killed while he was wandering around on the floors below, he probably would have been hidden overnight—there are simply millions of places—and moved up here later on."

"Right."

"What do you intend to do? I mean, how will you start?"

"With some dinner," Jordan answered. "Join me?"

Upon their return they put into action the plan they had devised. First, Gail sat under the green-shaded lamp and described, step by step, Dr. Weber's call on the evening on which he had last been seen.

Jordan listened carefully and asked a few questions. But when she had finished he shook his head. "I don't get it. I mean, what excited

him. . . . Let's go to Akeley Hall."

A policeman stood outside. He let them in. Dr. Jordan turned on a flashlight. A few bulbs were burning, far overhead. Otherwise, the vast panoply of African habitat groups was dark.

"I stood here," Jordan said, "and counted those stripes." He shone his light on the leg of a zebra. "I knelt to do it. There was somebody up above on the gallery. His back was toward me. I didn't even look, directly. I was concentrating and in a hurry. There was a smell of pipe smoke. I'm sure of that, now that I'm here. Paul's, I think. So he was up there when I was here—just as we both thought. He may have gone back again. Let's look it over."

They left the lower room and went up to the gallery entrance. It was unlocked. It was dark in the gallery, but not too dark for shadowy visibility. Gail was not afraid—only the dinosaur bones had the power to intimidate her—but she moved closer to Dr. Jordan.

"Old Paul," he said, "if it was old Paul, must have been standing right here."

"It's so real," Gail said, "that you can almost smell the African air."

"The fellows who made it would appreciate that compliment. . . . Now, if we assume Paul came back again we might imagine his attack occurred somewhere around here. Of course, we have no way of knowing exactly, or even approximately, when he was killed. I dare

say the fact that he was put in that preservative will prevent even the police examiner from determining the hour of death with any accuracy. . . . Shall we look around?"

Gail found herself searching painstakingly along the floor. Dr. Jordan had provided her with an extra flashlight and she used it, but without any feeling of effectiveness. Hundreds, probably thousands, of strangers had walked through the gallery since the night of the mineralogist's disappearance. She searched the floor, the protective rail in front of the glass, the molding beneath it, and the railing around the edge of the vast balcony which overhung the main chamber.

She stopped, pushed her flashlight close to the foot of the railing. "Here's something!"

Dr. Jordan came hastily:

The pool of light held on the railing base. In it were a half-dozen spots, smaller than pennies, and dark. "I thought—" she said.

The zoologist bent low. "You're right! Blood!" From his pocket he took a penknife. He hunted for an envelope, and produced an electric-light bill. He removed the bill and carefully scraped into the envelope a couple of the dry blemishes. Then, with great care, he examined the gallery for a distance of a few yards.

"I don't know much about blood," he said. "Human, that is. But plenty of people around here do. Martha Beal, for example."

"Under the circumstances—" Gail began.

"Under the circumstances, she might be exactly the right person."

They went back to the spot where they had found the blood and knelt over it for a final scrutiny. Gail was very conscious of Dr. Jordan kneeling there close to her. She thought that the sense of urgency which Dr. Jordan's nearness gave her was the kind of emotion men had—one perhaps not suitable to a girl.

He glanced up in time to see her looking at him. He blushed, so she knew he had interpreted her expression correctly.

He went on looking at her. "It's pretty swell of you," he said evenly, "to come here with me on a job like this. You're the kind of person, Miss V., that a fellow—"

He didn't get any farther. Gail saw a figure loom up behind him—suddenly and silently. She lost track of her bewildering feelings in the second it took to snatch his arm and pull him away. She half screamed, "Look out!"

Dr. Jordan jumped toward her and past her, like a cat. He spun and came up standing. Then he said, shakily, "Oh! It's you, Ivers! Lord, you scared us half to death!"

The Museum guard was big-boned, Irish, and somewhat amused at the havoc he had caused. "I've got on sneakers," he said. "Dr. Evans, and the cops, too, told me to keep a sharp lookout. I heard some-

body muttering in here. So of course I gumshoed in."

"The next time you gumshoe around me," Dr. Jordan said, "you're likely to get slugged."

Ivers apologized. "I'll remember. Made me nervous, what happened to Dr. Weber. Make anybody nervous. Not that I cared for him—"

"What was the matter with him, Ivers?"

"Fussy. Nosy. Always prowling around at night. Always getting us to open things up for him."

Jordan shrugged. "Okay. . . . Come on, Miss V. We'll hunt up Martha Beal." They walked from the gallery. "Irritation," he said to Gail as they waited for an elevator, "is not a motive for murder. But I suppose one of the guards could have killed Paul—if there's a fiend among 'em."

They went up to their floor and walked down the familiar corridor again. Gail still shaken from her fright at the looming appearance of Ivers, and from the emotions which he had interrupted. There was a light burning in Martha Beal's office. The door was open. But they had not reached it when Gail felt a repetition of the alarm which had accompanied Ivers' sudden materialization.

She had passed a space between ceiling-high specimen cases which lined that part of the corridor and, after going by, she had found herself entertaining the notion that somebody had been pressed back,

hiding, in that space. It was just an impression—a sense of whiteness where a face might have been. She halted.

Dr. Jordan went ahead, and peered into the office. "Martha?" He turned. "Not in."

"I think—" Reluctantly, uncertainly, Gail made herself walk back. Martha Beal was pressed between the towering cases as stiffly as a mummy.

Dr. Jordan saw her and said, "Good heavens!"

The woman stepped out of the recess. "I hoped you wouldn't notice me."

"We wanted to talk to you," Gail stammered.

"Exactly. And I wanted privacy. Well, you found me, so come in."

Gail realized that there would be no more explanation than that. The woman was going to let them think what they would. She couldn't have been hiding for long, Gail reflected. Around her workbench were the paraphernalia of an experiment left unfinished.

Miss Beal was tall and very gaunt. Her eyes were a washed-out shade of blue. Her hair had been dark red once, but it was now radi-dled with gray—long, knotted, and untidy.

About her was a curious aspect both of desuetude and fanatical energy. Her present expression was so rigid that Gail barely returned her look and deliberately let her eyes stray to the wilderness of material

in the room. There was everything, she noted, from shrunken human heads to headache remedies—from big brown bottles of acid to old shoes, a party hat, and a boomerang. It was a room in which Martha Beal not only worked but also had her principal existence.

Dr. Jordan, meanwhile, had been introducing Gail. Both women merely nodded, at his words. "I called here, Martha—or we did—because we wanted you to do us a favor."

"Naturally."

"It's about Paul. You've heard that—?"

"Yes. I heard."

Dr. Jordan was disconcerted. "The police," he explained haltingly, "asked us to do what we could to help. Miss Vincent and I were about the last people to see Paul alive. In my office, in her case; in Akeley Hall, in mine. We've been looking in Akeley Hall, and we found—" He told her about the blood.

She sat silent until he had finished. Then she said, "And you want me to examine it for you? Make sure it's human? Type it, if I can?"

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Martha."

"Why?"

Dr. Jordan flushed. "Well, I know—"

"You know *nothing!*" Her eyes gathered bitter light and darted from the man to the woman. "You

speak to me of Paul with emotion, with grief! What do you know about either one? The emptiness of both have been the fullness of my days! And now it's going to be a public topic! The police will dig it up, drag it out of me like a confession drawn from the victim of torture! I loved him!

"Yes, I was mad about him! He was the only man I ever had a chance to be mad about! I saw him every day, every hour. He appreciated me. My mind. We laughed at the same things, I let myself think that he was falling in love with me. And I made *him* think so. He wasn't, but how could he know that? I was ugly, even then. Unfeminine! Finally I was so sure of myself I gave him a chance to break the engagement. Casually, easily, because I was testing the strength of the false thing I had created. And he *broke it!*"

Martha Beal began to weep. Gail did not move. She wished she was somewhere else. In a moment, however, the disturbed woman went on.

"I hated him, after that! I fed myself on hate and anesthetized myself with work. And only tonight, when that talky, attractive woman in ichthyology told me about the discovery did my hatred begin to die down." She stifled the last vestige of a sob. She pushed back her hair. "Give me the blood!"

Dr. Jordan reluctantly handed her the envelope with the transparent window. He nodded to Gail.

"Don't go," Martha Beal said. "I can give you the first part of the report in no time."

They sat uncomfortably while she tapped out the brown powder, added a drop of liquid, and dexterously adjusted a microscope. "I can tell you Paul's blood type," she said in a low, heavy tone while she worked. "There's nothing about Paul Weber I can't tell you. He gave an emergency transfusion here once. He's Type Three." She peered into the eyepiece. "This is blood—yes. Human. The rest will take considerable time."

Dr. Jordan was standing, at last. "I'm sorry, Martha, that we were the cause of bringing all this up."

She didn't say a word.

They went out.

In the hall Dr. Jordan wiped his forehead. "More than I bargained for. I wanted to see her, but—"

"She's a little unbalanced about Paul."

"Just a touch."

"And that business of hiding. I thought maybe you'd ask her—"

"People don't usually ask Martha much. They wait to be told. But it's one to file and consider. One for Grove. Gosh! When I saw you seeing her, I felt my spine wilt!"

He opened his office door.

Inside, sitting at his own desk, was the lieutenant. "Been waiting for you two," he said. "Have some questions to ask. Incidentally, congratulations on finding the blood-stains!"

Jordan bristled. "How in the name—?"

"Just routine, Doctor. Number one, of course, was to check the places where the victim was last seen. My men collected a couple of blood samples while you were having supper. Number two was to keep an eye on the people who had last seen the deceased, although they were supposedly working for me."

Jordan grunted. "At least, we know where he was when he was attacked."

The lieutenant shook his head. "Maybe. Even probably. But we don't *know*. As a scientist, you'd doubtless say we did. As a cop, I say that all we know is that a few drops of somebody's blood got spattered at the bottom of the railing a couple of days ago. The cleaners missed them. The murderer, if he wiped up after the crime, also missed them. But several hundred people went by there. The blood might have come from a kid who cut his finger."

Gail said, "Better tell him about Martha Beal."

They told him.

He thought it over. "What was your feeling, Jordan?"

"That she'd do anything, if she wanted to."

"That's the impression I got. . . . Miss Vincent?"

"She's a bizarre sort of woman. She embarrasses you, deliberately. A little bit out of her head. She'd

been crying. At first, I thought it was for Paul. After she talked I realized it was from self-pity."

"That's what women usually cry from," Grove said cynically. "I ought to know. . . . See here. I want to ask you." He fished a piece of paper from his pocket. It was scribbled with notes that ran in all directions, as if they had been written against his knee and against walls. "Question number one: What sort of suit was Felton wearing Tuesday?"

Jordan said, "Good lord! That is a question! Brown I believe."

Gail laughed. "Blue. Blue-serge."

Grove glanced at her. "The point comes up because I've been questioning the guards who see people leave here. I asked them to try and remember anything peculiar about the people I mentioned. I got a zero, except that one of the guards said Felton was wearing a gray suit and stood around a while, apparently because he hated to go out in all the weather. I tried to check that point, but I got various answers. Pinsch couldn't remember what his pal wore. I haven't asked Felton himself, yet. Somebody else said black. But we've got gray, blue, black and brown."

"I'm not positive," Gail said, thinking. "Not when I try to visualize it."

"It goes to show," the lieutenant interrupted, "that people's memories aren't worth anything when you pin them down. A point you

both might bear in mind. . . . Next: What do you know about Dr. Lombardo? He was around here Tuesday night."

Gail shook her head.

Jordan reflected. "Garrison Lombardo's a popular lecturer. Audiences are crazy about him. I was never very friendly with him, myself. He's an M.D., you know; they're rare on the staff. Specializes in tropical diseases. I was going to take Miss Vincent in to see him next week. He can add a lot to our dossier on Africa for the War Department. Only, I was going to warn Miss V. that the eminent specialist has an eye for ladies."

"You can skip that," Gail said.

Grove grinned and looked at them inquiringly. "Okay. But you know nothing about his personal affairs? Didn't you know, for instance, that he's a gambler? That there's a rumor out he's lost thirty thousand dollars and is being hounded for it?"

"No," Jordan said.

"Do you know if, by any chance, Paul Weber has mentioned Lombardo in his will?"

"I suppose he mentioned all of us, more or less," Jordan replied. "Funny, I hadn't thought of it. Paul was pretty well fixed, you know. He located a lot of mines in his earlier days. He was as good a businessman as he was a mineralogist. And . . ."

"Well?"

"Come to think of it, Paul might

have made a special bequest to Lombardo. Lombardo once saved his life. In Africa. Lombardo was studying tsetses, and heard that a white man was very sick in the jungle. He went in, and found Paul dying and nursed him around."

"M-m-m-m," Grove said. He referred to his list. "The next question: Grant."

Jordan shrugged. "I know still less about him. He's a technician. Trained in the Middle West, St. Louis, or Kansas City. Good man. Been here two or three years. Keeps his mouth shut, and minds his own business."

"What kind of technician? Would he have access to the gorilla tanks?"

The zoologist grinned. "Lieutenant, you mustn't get thinking of those tanks the way the newspaper headlines do! To us, there's nothing gruesome or dramatic about them, any more than there is about handcuffs to you. . . . Sure; Grant would know about the tanks. They were merely equipment. They weren't locked."

Grove answered the grin with twinkling eyes. "Okay. We cops have found out a few things, though. Grant, for instance, has been in court twice since coming to Manhattan."

"What for?"

"Street fighting."

"That youngster! Fighting?"

"In Yorkville. Before Pearl Harbor. He got into tangles—"

"You mean he's a Nazi?"

"He was fighting pro-Nazis. He started one minor riot by heckling a Bundist soapbox speaker."

The policeman smiled at the doctor. "You're on our blotter, too, I discovered."

Jordan glanced at Gail and flushed darkly. "It was an impulse."

Grove addressed the girl: "Imagine! Same charge: assault. He was let off with a caution."

Gail stared incredulously at the scientist.

He was still red, but he grinned. "Did I hang one on that guy! It was at the zoo here in the Park. Some ignorant busybody told some kids that a raccoon was a panda. I corrected him. The oaf argued with me. One thing led to another. He swung, and I flattened him, and he began yelling for help. He charged me with assault and I counter-charged, and it came to nothing in the end."

The lieutenant folded his page of scrawled notes. He pushed back the doctor's chair. "Well, I'm tired and I bet you two are. . . . Did you bring that gorilla to America?"

Jordan frowned. "I dunno. I brought one from Shollt. It might be the same. Why?"

"Felton, I think it was, said you did. You did bring back a terrific load of stuff?"

"Yeah. I usually do."

Grove was at the door. "You birds get your stuff through customs easily, I take it?" He waited

for Jordan's nod. "Be a marvelous chance for smuggling."

Jordan's eyebrows lifted: "It would. Matter of fact, I've had offers."

"Offers?"

"Well, one offer. Last trip. Chap in Freetown, a Britisher, tried to persuade me to cart home a lot of ivory. It was undoubtedly ivory taken illegally, though he told me the old cock-and-bull story about getting it from the place where elephants go to die."

Still the lieutenant did not leave. "Where'd you put that can of quartz?"

Both Gail and the doctor glanced at the cluttered table upon which the coffee can had stood. Jordan said, "Guess Evans came for it. He said he was going to have it examined."

"He didn't. I phoned him while you were talking to Martha Beal."

"It was there when we went out to dinner," Gail said.

The lieutenant's voice was troubled: "That's what I thought. Somebody walked in between eight and nine, and took it. As usual around here, it could have been anybody. . . . Good night, Jordan. 'Night, Miss Vincent. If I were you two I wouldn't stand in any dark rooms with your backs turned!"

Jordan pondered after the policeman had departed. Presently he took a key ring from his pocket and crossed the gloomy office. A chest stood under windows which over-

looked the frozen Park. He unlocked it. "This is a rather nice case," he said modestly. "It belonged to a friend of mine, long since gone to his reward. Before that, it belonged to a rajah. Teak. For guns. I keep a few here—the old problem of no room at home. Want a looksee?"

The guns shone dully under a layer of dusty grease. Dr. Jordan picked out a medium-sized pistol and wiped it with waste. For a few minutes he worked expertly. He took cartridges from a box, inserted them, and dropped the pistol into his side jacket pocket. "You never know," he said.

They walked from the night-hung building together, for which the girl was glad. Jordan tried to take her mind off the doings of the long day. "Where's your home, Miss Vincent?"

"Washington."

"Family live there?"

"I haven't any family. Father died before I can remember. Mother ran a millinery shop in Detroit. She died four years ago."

"I see. Can I drop you? I'm taking a cab."

"Thanks."

Gail arrived at the Museum at a quarter of nine the next morning. It was an unsettled day—raw, with an indecisive threat of cold rain or wet snow. She ached a little from nervousness and lack of sleep. All night long she had kept

to mull over the events of the day before.

At the museum, she hurried from the elevator down the hall and turned into the office corridor. She banged squarely into somebody who had been making a turnabout, ricocheted, and looked up. It was Dr. David Felton. He had been pacing in front of the offices—pacing so anxiously he hadn't paid attention to her quick feet. That was all very plain in his manner. He began muttering apologies. His smooth, black pompadour was rumpled. He gesticulated. "Sorry. I've been waiting for Jordan."

"As a rule he doesn't get in till around ten." She took out her key and unlocked her door.

Dr. Felton was behind her. "I thought he might, though, today. I —er—maybe I'll wait."

He was wearing a gray suit today she noticed automatically. Whatever kind he'd worn on the suspected night, it was gray now. Gray, mussed, and with a hole burned in the trouser-leg—by nervous smoking, no doubt.

Felton sat down. "Awful. Awful thing! I wasn't precisely a friend of the deceased, but to think of him wandering as usual out there in the gallery! And then clubbed to death!"

He rose and began to pace again. Gail wondered how he knew Dr. Weber had been killed in the gallery. It was not common knowledge, so far as she was aware. She

eyed him, and he seemed to blanch under her scrutiny. "Won't wait, after all," he said curtly. "Thanks just the same!" He hurried from the room.

Gail sat down at her desk and thought that over. Presently she rose and followed him. He had gone back to his office. The door was shut. She could hear him on the telephone. His words weren't discernible but they sounded worried. She wondered if his colleague, Dr. Pinsch, were in the building. His office was a few doors away. She walked toward it, and Pinsch's voice came through the glass panel distinctly: "Of course not, Dave! Keep your shirt on!"

The voice inside the office lowered; Gail leaned against the door to try to catch the words. But she could hear nothing.

Then the door flew open; she lost her balance, and was forced to lunge into the office to regain it. Dr. Pinsch held the knob, looking angry and a little frightened. He was a small, fat man, sharp-eyed and sharp tongued. He had stepped aside to let her stagger through the door. He said, "Well?"

Gail tried her best to dissemble: "I was coming to call on you. I have a list of things to ask you and Dr. Felton—about water tables in the Ujiji country."

His expression became crafty. "And another list to ask us about the murder of Paul Weber? I've already heard you and Jordan are

stool pigeons for the police. I can't say that the staff appreciates it. It's surprising—in Jordan. You, coming from Washington, might be expected to be listening through key-holes."

Gail faced him. "All right! I was listening. Not because I work for the Government. But because I'm willing to help find out who killed a nice old man. You should be willing, too."

Dr. Pinsch grinned wryly. He pushed a chair beside his desk. "Sit down. Evans said you'd be interviewing me one day. Which is it—murder or geology?"

Gail said, "I'm embarrassed."

"You should be. Caught people usually are! I was talking to Dave. Dave Felton. He's frantic at the moment. The police called on him last night. As they did me. They have every reason to think that both he and I detested Weber, because we did. They have no reason to think we did away with Weber, because we didn't. But their attentions have seriously perturbed my friend. . . . And now we'll discuss Africa, if you wish."

She listened, and made the proper answers. He had covered up as neatly as possible for the telephone call and for Felton's nervous condition. She also thought that he would make an unpleasant, dangerous enemy. There was no way to tell exactly how his lifelong feud with Weber had affected him. It had enraged Dr. Felton. But Dr. Pinsch

was different. For one thing, he was brainier.

She accepted his material, promised to come back when she had digested it, and left him as soon as she could.

Henry Grant and Garrison Lombardo had also been in the Museum that night. She knew them both. Her researches into the private counsels of Felton and Pinsch had been interesting; so she decided to continue.

Henry Grant's office, on the sixth floor, was unlocked and deserted. Like the other shops and labs, it was odorous and crammed with miscellaneous apparatus: chemicals, armatures on which specimens were mounted, fossil rocks, imitation trees and flowers, and wooden bases glued together and held by clamps. Henry was a super-repairman, as well as a taxidermist of a highly specialized sort. His coat and hat were in the room, on a hook; in his coat pocket was a copy of a magazine dealing with natural history. It had a pterodactyl on the cover.

A woman in a smock glanced in at the door, said, "Where's Mr. Grant?" and answered herself: "Down working on the deep-sea exhibits, isn't he?"

Gail said, "I'm sure I don't know," and went down to the main floor.

There were not many visitors in the exhibition halls as yet. The room which depicted life under the

sea had been roped off. From behind the barrier came sounds of hammering. Gail ducked under the rope. In the faint, bluish light which represented sunshine fathoms below the surface of the sea, weird animals "swam" overhead and on all sides: sharks, turtles, and a gigantic manta ray.

Henry saw her and stopped hammering. "Hello, bright eyes!"

"Morning."

"Studying submarine fauna? Is the War Department planning to tell divers what to look out for along the African coast? Or are you working for the Navy now?" He laughed, and then coughed.

Gail smiled. "I came to see you."

Henry jumped down from a perch behind the manta ray and put his hammer in a toolbox. "Good! Time for it, too."

"I came on account of Paul Webster."

"Oh." He was disappointed. "I thought you were going to wheedle me into buying you a cup of coffee in the cafeteria."

She shook her head. "Some day—"

"Your 'some days' don't show up often." His good humor was strained by his chagrin. "I don't know a blooming thing about Paul Webster. Hardly said ten words to him since I came to work here. And the police have already investigated me. Why bother about these old dead men, bright eyes, when there's us young fellers around?"

"He was a nice old man. Dr. Jordan was mighty fond of him."

"Jordan, eh?" Henry said speculatively. "You falling for teacher? Jordan's hardly your type. Too stuffy." He coughed again.

"He is not!"

"All right. He is your type, then. And I'm not. And I'm busy."

"You didn't see anybody Tuesday night after you looked in on me?"

"No, Miss Holmes, I didn't." Henry was peevish. "Frankly, no. I went home. I caught a cold. I had to wait half an hour for a bus. As I told the police, I worked late on the so-called night in question. Some kids had knocked a slab of fossil rock off a pedestal, and Dr. Evans buttered me into staying overtime to mend it, and I did. But I didn't see any killers sneaking up on old Weber and I didn't see any ghouls hauling his body up to the tank."

"Oh, all right," Gail said. "You don't need to be snippy."

"I'm not snippy! I've got a cold. And I don't like pretty-girl busybodies going around asking questions. Why do you bother your head with things like—? . . . Lookee. When I get over this cold and you get over your crush on Jordan, suppose we take in a movie?"

"Sure. You just decide what movie and I'll go meekly. I'm going now, in fact."

"So long, bright eyes!" He coughed.

There was still Garrison Lom-

bardo, the M.D. Like Dr. Pinsch and Dr. Felton, he was on her list of staff members to interview for the War Department. Henry had been disappointing, but Dr. Lombardo might add something to the material she had collected from the two geologists.

He received her in a courtly manner. He would be delighted to put at her disposal any information he had about tropical medicine. The Ujiji country was fascinating from a clinical standpoint. It was refreshing to find that so charming and attractive a young lady had given her services to her country in this terrible emergency.

She took careful notes as Africa was discussed. He paced the floor, smiling, showing his white teeth, delicately brushing back his curly hair and fingering his mustache. She led the discussion away from African diseases to the topic of Dr. Weber's murder by such easy stages that Lombardo seemed unaware of the change.

His eyes rolled expressively. "What a loss! And what a terrible thing to do! The poor old man!"

"You were here?"

"Unfortunately. And the police have already discovered the fact."

"I suppose you didn't notice anything?"

"No. No, I didn't." He sighed and shook his head. "I didn't see Paul that evening. As it happens, though, I have what the police might consider an adequate motive

for wanting him dead. It is a personal matter. Such minds, the police have! He was my friend. But they insist that I might have destroyed him. Could I—would I—kill my friend and also sink him in a tank of preservative? It's unthinkable! The trouble is”—he smiled broadly—“I also had what they call an opportunity. I was not in my office, on Tuesday, for quite a while.”

“Oh?” Gail said.

“I was stealing.”

“Stealing?”

He nodded solemnly, and then laughed. “Imagine how unlucky! That night of all nights I decided to commit a small theft! Why? Because I dearly love my nephew, Angelo. On Sundays we build model airplanes. Last Sunday we were ready to paint our newest one. My nephew calls this one a dilly. Four feet over-all, with a gasoline motor! We needed aluminum paint, and, unfortunately, we had none. I thought it would be difficult to obtain because of the war and priorities. So I promised my nephew I would steal some from the paint shop in the Museum.”

Gail found herself smiling. “And you did?”

“Of course! I merely worked late, as I often do, anyway. I went down to the paint shop. The man who takes care of the furnaces was pottering somewhere. I heard him but I did not see him. I stole—in a bottle, some varnish—in a bag, the

powdered aluminum. I have an absent mind. I left it somewhere here and remembered it only this morning. Now, when I looked, I find it has been taken. The police, I suppose.”

“You told them?”

“Of course! Otherwise they would think I had been killing my friend.”

Gail rose to go. Dr. Lombardo rose, too.

“You've been very kind—”

He bowed. He came around his desk. He looked at her with a too-luminous light in his dark eyes. Gail backed a little bit, but he merely held out his hand. “Charming!” he said.

So she held out her hand. He seized it, kissed the back of it, and a moment later kissed her shoulder and her cheek.

He was talking. “You are so beautiful!” he said. “So often, every day, I have gone out of my way just to catch glimpses of you. So ravishing. I distress myself with it. Now I distress you with it—and I cannot help it!” He had taken her chin in his hand before she realized that she was going to be in the midst of a very long kiss in a very short time.

“Just let go of me,” Gail said quietly, “or I'll hang one on you.”

Dr. Lombardo persisted, with ardor. So Gail hung one on him. Possibly he had expected to be slapped, at the worst. He had certainly not expected a fast jab from

a tight and quite competent right fist. He let go, embraced himself, and swore softly.

Dr. Jordan was sitting on the chest under the window, smoking a cigarette. He said abruptly, "Where have you been? I—"

She told him in some detail: Felton, anxious and rumpled; his call to the deceptive Dr. Pinsch; the offhand Henry Grant; the grandiloquent medico. She left out the part she still felt in her knuckles.

He shrugged. "What have you got for all that running around, though?"

"I've got a concise picture of the Ujiji geology from Dr. Pinsch. And a list of the diseases in the area from Lombardo. He's not so very dangerous, really. Just—ultra-male. And I've also got suspicions. I'm practically sure, now, that Felton and Pinsch know something. They're hiding something. And they're in it together. Henry Grant's too nonchalant to be guilty of anything—"

There's a woman's intuition!"

"—and Dr. Lombardo's guile isn't dangerous—to men."

Jordan shook his head impatiently. He came slowly to his feet. "Let's call on Martha. She's just doing over what the police will do also. But she should be finished."

Gail followed Jordan around the "L" in the hall to the distant door of the woman scientist's quarters. Again the masculine voice

boomed, "Come in!" Again Gail found herself staring around at the incongruous disorder in the room that had served for so long as a working place, a living area, and a dump heap for the trivia of existence.

Martha Beal was listless. "I worked with the sample," she said. "It's Type Three. Paul's type. Not necessarily *his*, I realized. But it does seem likely that he was struck down in the gallery."

Jordan thanked her. "I guess I was over-zealous last night, Martha. I shouldn't have asked you to do what I did. I was unconsciously unkind. And the police did it all ahead of me. No doubt they've analyzed their samples, too."

Gail did not want to look at the crumpled, ugly, beaten figure. She kept staring at the room. She had a feeling that it was vaguely different from the way it had been on the evening before. Something had been moved, altered, replaced, or taken away. She couldn't decide what it was. And the room did not smell so strongly of chemicals; its morning scent was fresher and more familiar. Those thoughts barely reached the level of registration, for Dr. Jordan was already rising.

Martha Beal leaned forward and said, "Whatever you do, Horace, find the murderer! All last night I lay thinking—"

"I know. All last night a good many of us lay thinking, Martha."

"—and I knew how wrong I have

been! I loved Paul. He never loved me. I have clung for thirty years to a chimera, a lie, to self-deceit. He was a good man. He was good to me, even, not to assent to a marriage that would have been a tragedy. You were his pet—his protégé. He must be avenged."

They went out.

"Love," Jordan said, as they walked together through the building, "is every bit as dangerous and wounding as it is rewarding."

Gail answered "Yes" in a small voice.

He glanced at her, opened his mouth, and said nothing. They sat down in the office again.

"Whom do we work for now?" she asked. "The War Department or the police?"

He broke away from an abstraction. "Police," he answered. "I'm wrought up over this business. I don't think I'd concentrate very well on African flatlands. Would you?"

"No. Any ideas?"

"None. Only a plan. I think we ought to put down everything we've seen, heard, thought, suspected, guessed, and wondered about. Make a complete dossier on what happened to Paul, like the one we were making on the Ujiji country."

She smiled. "Even with maps?"

"If maps are necessary. Sure. Begin, not at the beginning, but with right now, and go backward. Put down all you observed about Mar-

tha, and all I did. All about Felton and the others. About Evans, Taylor, the guards, the whole business."

"It'll be quite a job," she said.

"Better than hoping we'll think of something, or that Grove will send for us."

"Then let's do it."

The rest of the morning was spent in compiling data. They filled two yellow blocks of ruled paper with their penned notes. Each of them tried to enter every observed detail, every inflection, every mood. They ate lunch hurriedly, in the basement cafeteria. They took advantage of their presence on that floor to look into the paint shop. They re-explored the gallery of Akeley Hall.

At three-thirty, when they had virtually completed their stock-taking, Evans phoned to request Dr. Jordan's presence at an emergency meeting of the Board.

Gail sat alone in the gathering gloom, studying the yellow pages. Occasionally, as she read, she made new entries on the margin. The account left glaring blanks. They didn't know for sure where Dr. Weber had been killed. Or where—or if—his body had been temporarily concealed. They didn't know what had been used as a weapon.

Gail thought about the matter of a weapon in connection with her suggestion that the murder might have been impulsive rather than planned. If the latter, the weapon would have been brought, and dis-

posed of. But if it had been an act only, momentarily premeditated, the killer would not, in all likelihood, have had a weapon on his person. He would have used something in the vicinity. He would have seen Dr. Weber enter the gallery and gone off to seek a tool. Gone to seek it in the Museum, a place where, as Evans had indicated, there were ten thousand blunt instruments.

Gail left the office.

The immediate exterior of the gallery was empty. But the place connected with other halls, with passages and corridors, with stairs, and the heavily ornamented staircases. The choice of weapons, even within a half-minute's walking distance, was considerable. Every available foot of wall space, in some areas, had been used for exhibits. And since many of them were of no intrinsic value, they were not attached firmly or kept behind glass. Maces and battle-axes, halberds, poleaxes, broadswords, American Indian war clubs, Australian boomerangs, small meteorites, petrified wood, tile from a Roman bath—each, in its way, suggested grim assassination.

Gail kept ruling out the ones that were impractical and the ones that would not satisfy the contour of the wound in the dead man's skull.

With a sudden prickling sense, she realized that one of the weapons displayed on the wall had a familiar connotation. For a little

while she could not place it. Then it came to her: the boomerang. There had been a boomerang somewhere—somewhere—and she remembered. *Everything*, Gail had noted, *from shrunken human heads to headache remedies, from brown bottles of acid to old shoes, a party hat, and a boomerang!* There had been a boomerang in Martha Beal's office on the night before; this morning Gail had sensed a change. *The boomerang was gone!*

She returned to the stairhead where the Australian weapons hung. There were three of them—dark, angled, polished. Upon two, was the inevitable accumulation of dust. The topmost, just within Gail's reach, was not dusty. On the contrary; it shone with the luster of a fresh coat of varnish. Gail, coming closer, realized that it was the smell of varnish which had obscured the chemical odors in Martha Beal's room that morning and given it a recognizable freshness.

Gail re-entered the office. Dr. Jordan had returned from the Board meeting. He was sitting by the window, staring at the dismal coming of night. When he heard her, he stood up, electrically, only to have whatever he was going to say quenched by her flow of words. She finished dramatically: "I suppose she could have learned to throw one, somewhere! I can imagine her, standing across the gallery or in the big room below and hurling that thing at him!"

Jordan stared. "It wasn't thrown, Miss Vincent—if it was used at all. Thrown, it hits edgewise. I know. I was struck, once, in northern Australia. Waited a month for a boat and about the only amusement was boomerangs. Edge-on, a boomerang makes a terrible wound, but a narrower one than the one we're dealing with. This one, and I'll agree you've probably found the weapon, must have been used flat side-on. As a club."

"Hadn't we ought to call Grove right away?"

"In a minute." He sat down again. "The Board meeting was stupid. A few of the city's richer men tried to blame Evans for letting a murder happen in these holy premises. He was politely 'scandalized' and 'helpless.' I sat, thinking of other things. Thinking of our list. And I thought of something rather interesting."

Gail said, "I'm sure Lieutenant Grove—"

"—ought to have *all* the facts we can possibly gather. What I thought of is that Felton doesn't smoke."

Gail looked blank.

"I mean," Jordan went on, "you mentioned that he was untidy. You said he'd burned a hole in his suit—smoking. But he *doesn't smoke*. It isn't much. But put it with the possibility that he *may* have worn a blue suit in here on Tuesday and *gone home in a gray one*. The one he wore today. Then what? Then something else burned that hole.

And what did that? Well, the mind jumps naturally to the thought that he may have scorched his gray suit at the time he was burning up his blue one."

Gail sat down abruptly. "Of course! Then you think *all three* of them—"

"I don't think anything yet. Two of them could easily be acting to cover up the third. Let's just add this to our notes."

He sat down at his desk. He took out his fountain pen and prepared to augment their collection of data. His pen had run dry. He shook it impatiently and unscrewed the top of his ink bottle. He thrust in his pen, pressed the valve lever, and frowned. He said, "Funny," and took out the pen. He tilted the bottle. Then, to Gail's surprise, he reached for an empty glass specimen dish and poured the ink into it. There was a clinking sound, and then with a blotter he fished out of the dish what looked like a glass pebble of good size.

"Some sort of stone," he said wonderingly. "I hit it with my pen point." He walked to the sink and washed the stone, disregarding the ink that stained his fingers. "Looks like a chip of that quartz, only it isn't yellow." He held it up to the light. Both of them bent forward intently. "Sparkles," he said. He carried the dish of ink to the sink, dumped it, and washed the dish. Then he took the stone between his thumb and forefinger and drew it

across the glass side of the vessel. It left a long scratch.

"I'll be back," he said. "Wait."

While he was gone, the telephone rang. Gail answered.

"Hello, gorgeous. It's me. Henry. Sorry I was churlish this morning."

"That's all right. You have a cold."

"So I do, darn it! Have you solved the crime and won the war yet?"

"Not quite yet, on either one."

"What about that movie date we were discussing? Seriously?"

"Seriously, I'm too busy. But, seriously, when I'm not, I'll let you know. My social life is thin these days. Nil, in fact."

"Okay. I feel better. And, look. About Tuesday night. I didn't see anything. Not really. I saw Pinsch and Felton, though, and they were talking about Weber. I remembered it after you'd gone. They were looking for him, I think. Maybe the police should know about that item. You tell 'em, will you? Cops irritate me."

"Sure. Where are they?"

"Down on your floor. . . . Well, phone me before I pine away."

Dr. Jordan hurried back into the office. She told Henry she'd call soon, and hung up.

"Who was that?"

"Henry Grant. Trying to date me."

For a moment she thought he was going to show signs of jealousy. Instead, he said, "Talented kid!" and jumped excitedly to the

matter in hand: "It's a diamond, all right! Uncut. Smith says it's worth about twenty thousand, as is. So I guess we'd better not take more notes or gather more facts. We'd better get Grove!"

But Homicide reported that Lieutenant Grove was out, was not expected, and could not be reached. Dr. Jordan left his name and an urgent request that he be called as soon as Grove reported in. Then he tipped back his chair and said, "Miss V., who'd hide an uncut diamond worth twenty thousand dollars in my inkwell? And why?"

"I don't know. It's crazy! I'm losing my mind, I think. Can't we do anything?"

"One thing: Supposing, still, that Felton burned up a suit of clothes—obviously, in our supposition, because it was bloodstained—he must have burned it here in the Museum, since he went out in other clothes. Where would he do it? If there's one thing the guards do look out for, it's fire. The only place I can think of is the incinerator."

"You mean—we'd better look there?"

Jordan grinned. "I mean we'd have to sift the ashes in it on the chance something didn't burn entirely and the further chance that it hasn't been cleaned since Tuesday night. Are you game? It's a dirty job and one I'd hate to be caught at by the wrong person, if we're on any track at all."

Gail nodded.

Even Jordan wasn't sure of his route. He dodged quietly through the cellar. The workmen had gone. Overhead, the exhibition floors were empty of visitors. It was nearing six.

The incinerator was a small, kiln-like structure in the quadrangle behind the main building. Jordan had provided himself with a segment of old window screen and a coal shovel. Enough light fell from the windows of the rooms in use to make it possible for him to shovel the smoldering contents of the incinerator into two large empty ash cans. He rolled them back into the cellar. Gail was shivering from her vigil just inside the door.

Together they began the job of sifting the two cans of charred debris and ashes. They recovered paper clips, bits of broken glass, some bottles, and two tin cans. And then, in the mess, Jordan saw something that made him say, "Hold it!" Gail stopped shaking the screen. Jordan plucked out a hook-like object about an inch long, made of flat metal.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Felton's tailor will know for sure," Jordan answered slowly. "But somebody's tailor sewed it into somebody's trousers, for a clasp, at the waistline. There'll be another metal piece here, a narrow one, for an eye. This is the hook. But we can let Grove's men go on hunting from this point. It would be quite a

coincidence—wouldn't it—if somebody else had just happened to have been burning up a pair of trousers here in the last few days? No sign of fabric, though. A thorough job. What do you say we wash up, leave our restaurant telephone number, eat, and come back and wait for Grove in my office?"

The lieutenant put in an appearance at nine o'clock that evening. He was brusque and patronizing until they had finished a long, joint recital. Then he looked from one to the other and whistled softly. "We could use you two permanently," he said. "Now, lemme get the picture. You think all three were in it?"

Gail interrupted, "Four, I just thought. That is, if you didn't pick up the aluminum paint Lombardo says he stole for his nephew."

"Pick it up? Us? No."

"Then Dr. Lombardo was lying, after all! He *didn't* steal paint for his nephew! He went down to get something to put on that boomerang so that no blood or fingerprints could ever be found on it. Varnish. He just brought along the powdered aluminum to make a good story. Because he said he never did take it home."

Grove thought a moment, after she had clarified that statement. "You think Lombardo and Martha Beal, Felton and Pinsch all worked together to do away with the doctor, then? They all had reasons, at

that! Hate, for the woman. Hate and spite and an old feud, for the two geologists. Desperate need of money, for Lombardo, and an expectation that he'd get some through Weber's death. Lombardo, incidentally, needs the money, all right. He owes, not thirty thousand, but about five thousand, to a gambler who has ways and means of collecting. So you think—?"

"They took the boomerang off the wall," Gail said rapidly. "One of them followed Dr. Weber into the gallery and struck him with it. Dr. Felton carried the body to a hiding place and burned his bloody clothes afterward. Martha Beal took charge of the boomerang. Lombardo got some varnish for her. And Pinsch—well, he was probably there, since his partner was. They thought, after they transferred the body to the gorilla tank the next day, that they had plenty of time to work in. It might have lain there for months. So Martha didn't chance putting back the boomerang right away. Felton kept wearing the gray suit so that, months from now, nobody'd remember when—"

Grove held up his hand. "All right. All right. I'll see Felton's tailor in the morning. If that's the kind of clip he uses I'll start with Felton."

"You mean you aren't going to arrest anybody right now?"

Grove shook his head. "Just assign men to 'em all. I'll phone you

in the morning. There are still a couple of matters I don't get."

"What?"

"Where's the can of quartz? And where'd that diamond come from?" He looked at them intently. "I'd like to take it along."

Jordan handed it over. "We talked about this. I think, myself, the diamond was in old Paul's pocket."

"Why?"

The zoologist shrugged. "I couldn't say. Talisman, maybe. He liked gems. Something he may have carried around for years. Or, perhaps, something he had with him that he intended to present to the Museum. He's made a lot of gifts to the Hall of Gems. I think the people who killed him, searched him, and probably decided to plant that stone in my office just to throw off anybody who found it. Maybe they expected to steal it back later. I never lock the place. And almost never use my ink bottle."

"And the quartz?"

"Why don't the police do a little of the work?" Jordan responded.

Grove winked. "I accept that. All right. You'd better knock off and go to the movies or something. I'll call you tomorrow."

He did call. Gail and Dr. Jordan were on hand before nine. He telephoned about ten. He said, "The tailor says it's one of his. I'm sending for Felton now."

The rest of the morning passed—and the afternoon. Toward five, Grove phoned again. "I'm getting nowhere," he said. "That is—not yet. Felton's mum, I sent for Martha Beal. Her story is that somebody put the boomerang in her office. She doesn't lock hers, any more than you do. She says she didn't even notice it until just before you two first called on her. She examined it, thought for a while she'd brought it in some time and then forgotten it.

"Next—I'm still following her story, which could easily be true—she says she noticed blood on it, and got panicky. She says, rightly enough, there was plenty to make us suspect her. So she looked through the other offices for some stain or lacquer that would make the boomerang proof against examination, and found what she wanted in Lombardo's office. She was coming back with it when you barged down the hall. That scared her and she ducked between the cabinets. You spotted her, so she cached the aluminum paint before she came out.

"She got it later, scrubbed the boomerang, dried it, put on the varnish, dumped the aluminum powder down the sink, and replaced the weapon before she went home. I had to tell her only enough to get her started, and she spilled all that, including that piece about Lombardo's aluminum paint. Lombardo does have a nephew, Angelo,

and he does make model planes with the kid Sundays. And there's a trace of aluminum powder in the woman's sink. So where are we?"

Jordan repeated the call almost verbatim to Gail. "It seems plausible—in fact, it couldn't be coincidence. She either told him the absolute truth or they're all extraordinary liars."

"What about Felton?"

"Nothing. Grove's keeping him. He just won't talk. So far, anyway, the threat of indicting him for murder hasn't budged him. He's staying in custody over Sunday. Well—?"

"We go home," Gail said. "I have a headache."

Sunday was bright and clear, and the longest day of Gail's life. She stayed in her room in her midtown hotel, hoping and expecting that she would be called. But her telephone did not ring once all day long.

Gail went to bed early and continued her daylong effort to divert herself by minutely reading the Sunday papers. But even the war news did not hold her attention. Once, a small item briefly registered on her consciousness because it mentioned diamonds: "Cartel Operator Sought," the paragraph was headed. "Konrad A. Zweissman, retired diamond expert and amateur explorer, at one time investigated by the Justice Department in connection with cartel activities said to be inimical to Amer-

ican interests, is being sought again by federal authorities. His last known residence was Catskill Vista, in New York."

The smallness and irrelevance of the item gave her a frantic feeling. She threw the paper aside. For a long time she considered telephoning Horace Jordan just to break the tense monotony of waiting. But she decided he would think she was being silly. She put out her light, finally. Friday's excitement at having accomplished so much became, by Sunday night, an almost unbearable feeling that she and Dr. Jordan had accomplished nothing at all. . . .

In the morning she dressed feverishly and hurried to the Museum. Dr. Jordan appeared an hour earlier than usual and he, also, looked as if he had spent a wracking weekend. They waited all morning, relieved somewhat by mutual companionship. Then, just before they left for lunch, Grove came. He sauntered up the hall, and threw his coat and hat on a chair.

"Well?" Jordan spoke impatiently.

Grove shrugged. "I've got Felton's story. Got it last night. And Pinsch has just corroborated it. Probably they're lying, but I'm darned if I can break it down! And I'd hate to accuse one of them wrongly. They'd raise unholy Ned! It's like Martha Beal's story—so simple you almost have to believe it. Stupid, maybe but the kind of

thing that stuffed shirts like Felton will do when they think they're in a jam. He said, when he finally sent for me, and he said it all without prompting, that he and Pinsch found Weber lying dead in Akeley Hall.

"Seems they'd gone to the old man's office, and from there around the Museum, hunting him. They knew he was in; knew his habits. They had some fresh geological debate to needle him with. That's why they were looking for him that night. They pushed into Akeley Hall. The gallery. And he was lying there dead, with a boomerang on the floor beside him."

"And you believed that!" Jordan was indignant.

"Wait a minute. Wait till I fill in. Felton saw, at once, that if he and Pinsch raised a hue and cry, they'd be suspected. He had near hysterics, at first. Then he insisted that they should remove every trace of the crime in order to keep themselves clear. Pinsch didn't want to until what he calls the 'sardonic side of making the old man vanish,' hit him. *He* thought of the gorilla tank, naturally. He made Felton do the heavy work.

"They wrapped Weber in a tarpaulin—and remember, they both told the identical story separately, though they've had ample time to prepare it. They hid the body up on this floor in the blower-room, where almost nobody ever goes. They searched Paul. That dia-

mond, they said, was in his pants pocket. They put it in your ink-well. One for you to ponder—and us cops if the thing was ever found. They put the boomerang in that incredible morass Martha Beal calls her office, thinking that she was an even better suspect than you or themselves—if, when, and as.

"Next, Felton says, they went down and burned his suit. It was easy. There was nobody in the cellar at all. Not around the incinerator, anyhow. Felton had had that gray suit in a box in his office for two months, since late fall. He'd taken it into town for repairs and neglected to carry it home. Says he detests to carry packages on trains—imagine that! They figured, after that, on at least a month during which Paul Weber would be merely a missing person. In that time, they thought, they could either dispose of the body or leave it where it was to create the havoc it did when Taylor found it. Only, he found it quicker than they were prepared for. Even that metal pants clasp would have gone out in the ashes on Saturday, though it seems they'd never thought of that. The only other thing Felton did, that he calls a 'mistake,' was to hesitate about going out on a cold night, late, in a thin suit. The guard noticed and remembered it."

Jordan said, "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Me, too! Of course, we're still holding him. It isn't legal to move

murdered people around. But neither is it necessarily a solution to who killed Weber."

"What are you going to do next?"  
Grove shrugged. "I wish I knew. Any thoughts?"

Jordan shook his head. So did Gail.

"I'm gonna eat," Grove said. He departed perplexedly.

And presently Jordan left for lunch. Gail felt in no mood to accept his invitation. She went out alone and had coffee and hamburger in a hole-in-the-wall. Dr. Jordan didn't come back after lunch, and Gail started going through the mail that had accumulated in the office for some days. It lay piled on the table nearest the door. In it was an unwrapped copy of a natural history magazine, presumably left there for Dr. Jordan. The current issue. There was a flamingo on the cover.

Gail began to look through it. Ordinarily it would have absorbed her interest. Now she jumped from one picture to the next, feeling frustrated, lonely, and disappointed in everything.

By and by it occurred to her that this wasn't the current issue. She looked at the cover again. The date was correct but, she thought, there was a pterodactyl on the current issue. She wondered why she had thought that, and recalled the copy of the magazine that had been in Henry Grant's pocket. He must have been reading an old issue. She

asked herself why, because she had fallen into the habit, in the past week, of asking the "why" of everything. She decided to find out. It would be better to do even that than just to sit here.

In the library she found the file of magazines she wanted. The one with the flying reptile on the outside was two months old. She carried it back to the office. She leafed through it as she had the first, and she found nothing that seemed relevant. Defiantly she put it aside. For a long time she compelled herself to work on the notes about Ujiji for the War Department. When she ran out of will power it was growing dark again. New York City was wrapping itself in veil after veil of winter mist. It would be night again before closing time. She switched on her light, and once more examined the magazine she had taken from the library.

This time she decided to be more methodical. She began with the table of contents. She got no farther. One of the articles was entitled, "Semi-precious Stones of the Amazon Basin." Its author was Konrad A. Zweissman.

At first the name was tantalizing. She seemed to associate it with something that had happened long ago. But, after much frowning concentration, its relationship came back to her. She had seen the name only yesterday in the newspapers: "Diamond expert . . . sought by the Justice Department . . . cartel

activities inimical to American interests . . ."

She sat rigidly. A new idea had leaped into her mind. The things they had neglected suddenly began to take new forms. The can of quartz and the man who wanted to smuggle ivory; the Boers who had actually been German agents and Paul Weber's excitement on the night he had come to see Jordan; the possible significance of the old mineralogist's last stroll through the Museum and his enjoyment of his joke.

Part of her thinking was logical, part guesswork, part intuition. But it began with Zweissman, the man who was apparently an enemy agent and wanted by the FBI. A man who was an authority on diamonds. A man who had sufficient prestige to write an article for a natural history magazine. There had been one diamond—large, valuable, uncut, inexplicable. Had it been in that coffee can of quartz samples? And, if it had, wasn't it possible that there had been *more* diamonds like it?

Ujiji was a long way from the Transvaal, where diamonds are found. But it was in Africa. Couldn't Nazi agents have gathered together a hoard of gems and entrusted them to someone who would get them out of Africa? Couldn't they have planned to send them, via America and Japan, to Hitler's war chest? So as not to risk them in Holland, the usual

destination? Wasn't war coming soon to Holland? And wouldn't any such diamonds have to be *smuggled*? They would never get out, otherwise. And couldn't Horace Jordan have been made the unwitting victim of the affair?

Was the "Englishman" who sounded him out about smuggling old ivory, not English, but another German agent? Was he, perhaps, testing Jordan? And when he found Jordan uninterested, hadn't he nonetheless secreted his precious hoard in the can of quartz, where it would be magnificently hidden? Where even a customs inspector would probably not have made any distinction between the clear yellow fragments and the still clearer white ones?

Then what? Jordan, unknowingly, brought diamonds into America. Presumably, the agents on this side had a plan to intercept them. A paid agent "placed" inside the Museum. Or a staff member hard up for cash. Or a member secretly on their side. Somebody. Only—and Gail became certain she was on the right track—only, Dr. Jordan *hadn't* brought the quartz directly to the Museum! He hadn't stored it in any usual place, such as his home, either. No doubt his home had been carefully, tracelessly searched. But he had lacked room at home. He had sent the can of quartz, with some other things, to his sister's house in New Jersey, and there it had sat for three years,

while baffled agents sought furiously for it!

It had reappeared on Tuesday—brought into the Museum by Dr. Jordan and turned over to Weber. Somebody had seen the coffee can, and, from that instant on, the old doctor had been in fearful danger.

Some time in the evening he had dumped out the quartz, had seen, perhaps at a glance, just what it was, and then—what lay beneath it. He had verified his discovery. Marvelled over it. Come to see Jordan, maybe, at dinnertime, and missed him. Wandered around, excitedly. Carrying in his pocket one of the diamonds, with which to confront Jordan.

But Paul Weber had missed Jordan. He had written down the basic analysis of the yellow quartz as a "joke"—a joke, since he probably thought Jordan knew the different, colorless stones also were in the can but did not realize their worth. Then, having missed Jordan, Weber had gone out, leaving the can and the quartz—but not the diamonds. He had said, vaguely, that, "it would keep," and that he had "taken care of things."

If there had been many diamonds worth twenty thousand dollars apiece, that could have meant only one thing: He had hidden them. Certainly, he would not have left them lying about in his office. Perhaps, even then, he was worried. Perhaps he had seen a face looking in at him or had heard stealthy

footsteps. But he had surely concealed the diamonds which Gail had hypothesized, whether he had been alarmed by anything or not.

Gail capped that brilliant piece of deduction by another. There was no place to hide jewels in the gallery of Akeley Hall. But old Paul had another haunt, one to which he possessed the key: the Hall of Gems. There, he was at home. And if the diamonds could be exquisitely camouflaged in a can of quartz chips, they could be concealed in the same way, and just as effectively, somewhere in the Hall of Gems.

Gail raced through the long, somber corridor. Her feet pattered on the stone stairs. She hurried into the Hall of Gems. The lights were on and the vast chamber gleamed like the cave of a genie. The extreme beauty of the place struck her. She began moving past the exhibits, searching intently. In the room were perhaps a dozen persons. But it would soon be closing time. A uniformed guard was already standing at the gate. She read labels: beryl, topaz, amethyst, citrine, which looked like the quartz in the coffee can.

Why, though, was Dr. Weber killed, she wondered? Then she knew. Even to be *aware* of the existence of the precious stones was to menace their delivery to Germany. He had known too much. Jordan didn't know. Weber had died, and the search for the treasure, concealed again by him, had

been resumed. It was surely still going on.

She walked around a case filled with porphyrite and peered into its back. Nothing . . .

All that Martha had said, all that Felton and Punsch had reported, and the absurd story of Lombardo—all were true. They had done what they had admitted, and nothing more. Tourmaline, jade, onyx . . .

She came to a large geode in a special case. She drew her breath and bent nearer. A geode, the sign explained, is stone within a stone a nodule formed in a rock pocket by seeping minerals. Its interior, as a result, is filled with crystals, except for the center, which is usually hollow. This stone was about the size of her head. It had been sliced through, so that a "lid" could be removed. It lay in the case, like a jack-o'-lantern on its side.

In it, she saw the glittering, transparent arrangements of crystals that had "grown" toward the center. They were in parallel stalks about as thick as her fingers. Beyond them, in the back, where the light barely made them distinguishable and where no human being would ever have noticed their differentness, if that person had not been looking for it, were many more crystals. These were not attached.

The diamonds Dr. Weber had found could have lain in the geode for a century, undetected. It furnished a superb hiding place.

When she saw them in the shadow within the stone, masked by the crystal fingers of larger and therefore more spectacular prisms, she could hardly believe her senses. She—Gail—had figured it out and proved she was right! The myriad crystals which were part of the geode consisted, the sign said, of quartz, or  $\text{SiO}_2$ . So, perhaps, Dr. Weber's joke had included a sly hint of the hiding place of the gems, a hint which he could have interpreted!

The next thought that entered her mind was one that made her afraid.

Dr. Weber had found the diamonds. And died. Did the murderer know where they were now? Had he located them yet? Was he, even at this instant, in the Hall with her, watching? He had obviously stolen the coffee can from Dr. Jordan's office and found they were not in it.

Fearfully, she looked around. In the dull electric light the few remaining people seemed harmless enough. A warning bell and the urging of the guards would soon send them on their way to the elevators and the exits.

Gail left the Hall of Gems. She crossed the Hall of the Age of Man, with its towering mammoth. Beyond, were the elevators. One car closed its gate and started down as she approached. She would take the next, whichever way it went. People were already gathering.

Then she decided not to take it. The chances that she was even now being watched were minute. But what if she were? Suppose the murderer had been one of the guards? The guard now entering the Hall of Gems?

She turned toward the staircase that led up to the fifth floor, and observed that Dr. Evans was standing at its foot, talking to another man. Near-panic seized her. Suppose it was Dr. Evans, and he had been watching her? She walked hastily into the room beyond. It was filled with fossil mammals. She could go on around to the north elevators. Dr. Evans, she thought, had every right to be talking to a man on the exhibition floor.

But her sense of normalcy crumbled steadily. She went on, almost at a trot, into the room that held fossil reptiles, the room that held her phobia, also. Beyond that were the cretaceous dinosaurs and, beyond them, a hallway.

The closing bell was sounding somewhere. A guard called to her that it was time to leave. She nodded; the man went on. Above her, now, towered the mighty piles of brown bones that had once been the frames of living animals—gigantic biological machines. The bell rang again. The guard's voice was far behind her. And the lights went out.

They flashed out in sections, but very rapidly. The last half of them went dark all together, as if a fuse

had blown. Gail stopped stock-still. Coincidence? The footsteps of the departing visitors echoed ahead and behind. An iron gate clanged. Full of a new horror, Gail rushed toward the hall. Light from it silhouetted the ribs and vertebrae of the monsters. She felt sweat leak down her sides under her dress. For a moment she considered running back. She looked around—into the dim, cavernous vault behind her. She turned again.

The gate to the hall was moving. Then the guard who had his hand on it suddenly let go, and the hand vanished. Beyond him, she heard a muttered and a muffled cry of "Fire!"

An elevator door calmly opened. The last of the people in the hall entered it with a rush and it went down. A thin vine of smoke was swinging down the distant passageway.

She heard a low, bubbling sound, like a whisper, and, even as it started, she dodged. Something hard and heavy crashed beyond her and slithered on the polished floor. Gail knew then.

The gate behind her clanged shut. She was trapped. She screamed for help, her voice splitting the darkness. With an instinct that was repellent even as it made her act, she slid into the murk at the side of the room, out of the pale, uncertain light that shone through its middle. Now she could see the monsters dimly. They were

like titanic cattle, staring and grazing in the gloom. Only there was no flesh on them and no skin. Swiftly, breathing with desperate care so as not to make a sound, she slipped off her shoes. The person who had thrown the missile at her was in the room. In her stocking feet she began to hurry along the bare, smooth stone floor.

Once, she distinctly heard the soft rap of lightly running feet. Then she heard nothing for a while. She moved around cases and skeletons, putting distance between her and the place where the tapping sound had originated. But the move only sent her deeper into the vaulted chamber, toward the end where the gate was already closed and locked. In the corridor there was still smoke and confused shouting. Sheer horror, she realized, was rapidly weakening her.

A cough, dry, low, and muffled, sounded briefly. The hair rose on the nape of her neck; she knew for certain—everything.

She tiptoed along. On a dais, between Gail and the hall, was the figure of another dinosaur, a horizontal ladder of enormous ribs with huge, flared horns. Gail ducked under the heavy silk cord that roped it off. She put a tentative foot on the great knee bone, tested it, and heaved herself up, like a child climbing into a tree. The thick, splayed bones, as big as a good-sized table, silently received her. She crouched on them rigidly.

The reek of smoke was now permeating the darkness. It wasn't like any Gail had ever smelled before. In the corridor men were shouting more loudly. From far away came the sizzle of an extinguisher. Below, on the floor of the chamber, was another sound—the same cough, muffled and horrid. Then Gail could vaguely make out a figure. It came forward in a crouch. The distant source of faint light shone hideously on the eyeballs for an instant. Afterward, it made a glint in Henry Grant's hand, the glint of a gun. He was coming quickly, but with caution, peering into every recess, and—she observed with a last desperate surge of horror—looking up into the colossal skeletons, too. He would not fail to see her.

The elevator banged again. Feet ran. A broad brogue came clearly to her ears: "It was a smokepot, Doc!"

Then Dr. Jordan's voice: "Get those lights on!"

"The boys are busy with 'em now."

Gail saw the figure below come to a halt. An ecstasy of fear welled in her. She did not dare to scream. It would give away her hiding place. Then Grant might not only kill her, but Dr. Jordan, also.

The gate was pushed wide open again. The guard said, "I think maybe that scream came from the room here—the one that went dark. Probably a scared tourist!"

Horace Jordan was coming in. She could see him clearly, silhouetted against the door. His voice was like broken glass. "Yeah, Kelli. If it was the girl I've been looking for the last half-hour, and anything has happened to her, I'm going to break you apart! She's the finest kid in the world! You shouldn't have left this spot!"

Her eyes darted back to Grant. She could see his teeth, now, faintly white; his arm was coming up. She knew what she had to do, then. Her voice was clear and loud: "Look out, Horace!"

The figure at the door dodged inside. Grant's gun split the darkness. Instantly, Horace Jordan's gun shot back. She saw Grant dive for cover in the deeper darkness. As he plunged, he fired again. The bullet ripped the great bones that concealed her. With the second flash came a second reply. For a few, infinite seconds, the two guns flashed in the dark. Then there came the sound of metal clattering on the floor.

The lights went on.

Grant was holding his arm, and blood was spurting from it. Dr. Jordan was standing just inside the door with his pistol in his hand. He blinked, glanced once at Grant, and started searching the great, skeleton-filled chamber for the girl.

"I'm right up here, H-H-Horace," she said, and then the dam broke and she burst into tears.

The zoologist ran. Gail half tum-

bled out of the thing of which she had been most afraid in the world. But she wasn't even thinking of dinosaurs. She was thinking of the way Horace Jordan had spoken about her.

He held her while she wept and shook. Behind them, the guards were taking charge of Henry Grant.

The doctor spoke, finally, in a wondering tone. "Horace," he repeated. "You called me Horace! And you're crying. Now, I must say, that's damn' human of you!"

Gail responded in a faint but determined tone, "Of course I'm human! If you only knew *how* human!"

She felt his arms tighten. "That," he said, "is what I aim to find out. I've been afraid for months you weren't real. The package was so irresistibly attractive, I couldn't believe that it held more than a mere brain. And brains, around here, are a nickel apiece! This is a lousy way to make love—and a particularly lousy place!"

She giggled. . . .

Dr. Evans was there in the familiar office, and Lieutenant Grove. Gail had been talking for quite a while and Horace Jordan was getting impatient.

"How does it happen," Evans asked, "that you were afraid of me, since you had figured out so much? I mean this afternoon on the stairs?"

"Because it was only figuring. I wasn't certain of anything. I thought it was Henry, because of that issue of the magazine. He'd been reading that article, I imagined. Or maybe he translated it. Or placed it. But I couldn't prove it wasn't you—or anybody."

Evans turned to Grove: "What about Grant?"

The police officer grimaced. "The FBI gets that baby! They always get the good ones! But he said plenty before they came for him. He's been in a terrible sweat, as you can imagine. I mean, he killed Weber there in the dark and raced back up to this floor to get the diamonds. They were missing. He made as careful and fast a search of Weber's office as he could, and then went back to do something about Weber's body. Remove the traces he'd left.

"But the boomerang he'd snatched for the killing was gone. The body was gone. The blood-stains, even, were gone. You can imagine the sort of days and nights he put in on Wednesday and Thursday! Then Weber's body was discovered, and Grant began to look frantically for the jewels. He stole the can, of course, and dropped it in the Hudson River on his way home, the same night. He came to the same conclusion Miss Vincent did, and located the geode. He says the diamonds are worth about four millions.

"He didn't dare smash right in.

He made the smoke bomb to fake a fire at closing time, when things are jumbled, anyway, and the guards are busy with the public. He planned to touch off and blow some fuses, then to get to the geode. He was just checking things over when he saw Miss Vincent looking at the cache."

"Nazis!" Jordan said, with loathing.

Grove nodded. "He even beat up his own kind, to look like a good citizen. That I call low!"

Evans said thoughtfully, "Well, it's over. I'm glad." He looked up quickly. The Museum won't ever be

able to repay it debt, Miss Vincent.

Horace Jordan rose with determination. "This sort of business," he said sternly, "can go on for hours! We all know what happened. I, personally, will undertake to pay a portion of the Museum's debt with one small steak—if there's one to be had. Mind you, gentlemen, I am not offering more steaks. One—only one. And then I am going to put the Museum in Gail's debt in perpetuity, if she'll have me. . . . Come on, Gail."

"Yes," Gail answered. "Yes to the beefsteak—and yes to the perpetuity!"



# Agatha Christie

## The Red Signal

*The creator of Hercule Poirot is a magician at creating illusion—she can slip in a clue here, a clue there, and make you think one thing when all the time, staring you in the face with invisible obviousness, the clues mean something else. And only at the end do you see that Agatha Christie's subtle direction is really subtle misdirection.*

**N**o, BUT HOW TOO THRILLING," said pretty Mrs. Eversleigh, opening her lovely, but slightly vacant, blue eyes very wide. "They always say women have a sixth sense; do you think so, Sir Alington?"

The famous alienist smiled sardonically. He had an unbounded contempt for the foolish pretty type, such as his fellow guest. Alington West was the supreme authority on mental disease, and he was fully alive to his own position and importance. A slightly pompous man of full figure.

"A great deal of nonsense is talked, I know that, Mrs. Eversleigh. What does the term mean—a sixth sense?"

"You scientific men are always so severe. And it really is extraordinary the way one seems to positively know things sometimes—just know them, feel them, I mean—quite uncanny—it really is. Claire knows what I mean, don't you, Claire?"

She appealed to her hostess with

a slight pout, and a tilted shoulder.

Claire Trent did not reply at once. It was a small dinner party—she and her husband, Violet Eversleigh, Sir Alington West, and his nephew Dermot West, who was an old friend of Jack Trent's. Jack Trent himself, a somewhat heavy florid man, with a good-humored smile, and a pleasant lazy laugh, took up the thread.

"Bunkum, Violet! Your best friend is killed in a railway accident. Straight away you remember that you dreamed of a black cat last Tuesday—marvellous, you felt all along that something was going to happen!"

"Oh, no, Jack, you're mixing up premonitions with intuition now. Come, now, Sir Alington, you must admit that premonitions are real?"

"To a certain extent, perhaps," admitted the physician cautiously. "But coincidence accounts for a good deal, and then there is the invariable tendency to make the most of a story afterwards."

"I don't think there is any such thing as premonition," said Claire Trent, rather abruptly. "Or intuition, or a sixth sense, or any of the things we talk about so glibly. We go through life like a train rushing through the darkness to an unknown destination."

"That's hardly a good simile, Mrs. Trent," said Dermot West, lifting his head for the first time and taking part in the discussion. There was a curious glitter in the clear grey eyes that shone out rather oddly from the deeply tanned face. "You've forgotten the signals, you see."

"The signals?"

"Yes, green if it's all right, and red—for danger!"

"Red—for danger—how thrilling!" breathed Violet Eversleigh.

Dermot turned from her rather impatiently.

"That's just a way of describing it, of course."

Trent stared at him curiously.

"You speak as though it were an actual experience, Dermot, old boy."

"So it is—has been, I mean."

"Give us the yarn."

"I can give you one instance. Out in Mesopotamia—just after the Armistice, I came into my tent one evening with the feeling strong upon me. Danger! Look out! Hadn't the ghost of a notion what it was all about. I made a round of the camp, fussed unnecessarily, took all precautions against an at-

tack by hostile Arabs. Then I went back to my tent. As soon as I got inside, the feeling popped up again stronger than ever. Danger! In the end I took a blanket outside, rolled myself up in it and slept there."

"Well?"

"The next morning, when I went inside the tent, first thing I saw was a great knife arrangement—about half a yard long—struck down through my bunk, just where I would have lain. I soon found out about it—one of the Arab servants. His son had been shot as a spy. What have you got to say to that, Uncle Alington, as an example of what I call the red signal?"

The specialist smiled noncommittally.

"A very interesting story, my dear Dermot."

"But not one that you accept unreservedly?"

"Yes, yes, I have no doubt but that you had the premonition of danger, just as you state. But it is the origin of the premonition I dispute. According to you, it came from without, impressed by some outside source upon your mentality. But nowadays we find that nearly everything comes from within—from our subconscious self."

"I suggest that by some glance or look this Arab had betrayed himself. Your conscious self did not notice or remember, but with your subconscious self it was otherwise. The subconscious never forgets. We believe, too, that it can reason

and deduce quite independently of the higher or conscious will. Your subconscious self, then, believed that an attempt might be made to assassinate you, and succeeded in forcing its fear upon your conscious realization."

"That sounds very convincing, I admit," said Dermot, smiling.

"But not nearly so exciting," pouted Mrs. Eversleigh.

"It is also possible that you may have been subconsciously aware of the hate felt by the man towards you. What in old days used to be called telepathy certainly exists, though the conditions governing it are very little understood."

"Have there been any other instances?" asked Claire of Dermot.

"Oh! yes, but nothing very pictorial—and I suppose they could all be explained under the heading of coincidence. I refused an invitation to a country house once, for no other reason than the 'red signal.' The place was burned out during the week. By the way, Uncle Alington, where does the subconscious come in there?"

"I'm afraid it doesn't," said Sir Alington, smiling.

"But you've got an equally good explanation. Come, now. No need to be tactful with near relatives."

"Well, then, nephew, I venture to suggest that you refused the invitation for the ordinary reason that you didn't much want to go, and that after the fire, you suggested to yourself that you had had a warn-

ing of danger, which explanation you now believe implicitly."

"It's hopeless," laughed Dermot. "It's heads you win, tails I lose."

"Never mind, Mr. West," cried Violet Eversleigh. "I believe in your Red Signal. Is the time in Mesopotamia the last time you had it?"

"Yes—until—"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing."

Dermot sat silent. The words which had nearly left his lips were: "Yes, *until tonight*." They had come quite unbidden to his lips, voicing a thought which had as yet not been consciously realized, but he was aware at once that they were true. The Red Signal was looming up out of the darkness. Danger! Danger close at hand!

But why? What conceivable danger could there be here? Here in the house of his friends? At least—well, yes, there was that kind of danger. He looked at Claire Trent—her whiteness, her slenderness, the exquisite droop of her golden head. But that danger had been there for some time—it was never likely to get acute. For Jack Trent was his best friend, and more than his best friend, the man who had saved his life in Flanders and been recommended for the V.C. for doing so. A good fellow, Jack, one of the best. Damned bad luck that he should have fallen in love with Jack's wife. He'd get over it some day, he supposed. A thing couldn't

go on hurting like this forever. One could starve it out—that was it, starve it out. It was not as though she would ever guess—and if she did guess, there was no danger of her caring. A statue, a beautiful statue, a thing of gold and ivory and pale pink coral . . . a toy for a king, not a real woman. . . .

Claire . . . the very thought of her name, uttered silently, hurt him. . . . He must get over it. He'd cared for women before. . . . "But not like this!" said something. "Not like this." Well, there it was. No danger there—heartache, yes, but not danger. Not the danger of the Red Signal. That was for something else.

He looked round the table and it struck him for the first time that it was rather an unusual little gathering. His uncle, for instance, seldom dined out in this small, informal way. It was not as though the Trents were old friends; until this evening Dermot had not been aware that he knew them at all.

To be sure, there was an excuse. A rather notorious medium was coming after dinner to give a *séance*. Sir Alington professed to be mildly interested in spiritualism. Yes, that was an excuse, certainly.

The word forced itself on his notice. An *excuse*. Was the *séance* just an excuse to make the specialist's presence at dinner natural? If so, what was the real object of his being here? A host of details came rushing into Dermot's mind, trifles

unnoticed at the time, or, as his uncle would have said, unnoticed by the conscious mind.

The great physician had looked oddly, very oddly, at Claire more than once. He seemed to be watching her. She was uneasy under his scrutiny. She made little twitching motions with her hands. She was nervous, horribly nervous, and was it, could it be, *frightened*? Why was she frightened?

With a jerk he came back to the conversation round the table. Mrs. Eversleigh had got the great man talking upon his own subject.

"My dear lady," he was saying, "what *is* madness? I can assure you that the more we study the subject, the more difficult we find it to pronounce. We all practise a certain amount of self-deception, and when we carry it so far as to believe we are the Czar of Russia, we are shut up or restrained. But there is a long road before we reach that point. At what particular spot on it shall we erect a post and say, 'On this side sanity, on the other madness'? It can't be done, you know. And I will tell you this: if the man suffering from a delusion happened to hold his tongue about it, in all probability we should never be able to distinguish him from a normal individual. The extraordinary sanity of the insane is an interesting subject."

Sir Alington sipped his wine with appreciation and beamed upon the company.

"I've always heard they are very

cunning," remarked Mrs. Eversleigh. "Loonies, I mean."

"Remarkably so. And suppression of one's particular delusion has a disastrous effect very often. All suppressions are dangerous, as psychoanalysis has taught us. The man who has a harmless eccentricity, and can indulge it as such, seldom goes over the border-line. But the man"—he paused—"or woman who is to all appearance perfectly normal, may be in reality a poignant source of danger to the community."

His gaze traveled gently down the table to Claire, and then back again.

A horrible fear shook Dermot. Was that what he meant? Was that what he was driving at? Impossible, but—

"And all from suppressing oneself," sighed Mrs. Eversleigh. "I quite see that one should be very careful always to—to express one's personality. The dangers of the other are frightful."

"My dear Mrs. Eversleigh," expostulated the physician. "You have quite misunderstood me. The cause of the mischief is in the physical matter of the brain—sometimes arising from some outward agency such as a blow; sometimes, alas, congenital."

"Heredity is so sad," sighed the lady vaguely. "Consumption and all that."

"Tuberculosis is not hereditary," said Sir Alington drily.

"Isn't it! I always thought it was. But madness is! How dreadful! What else?"

"Gout," said Sir Alington, smiling. "And color blindness—the latter is rather interesting. It is transmitted direct to males, but is latent in females. So, while there are many color blind men, for a woman to be color blind, it must have been latent in her mother as well as present in her father—rather an unusual state of things to occur. That is what is called sex limited heredity."

"How interesting. But madness is not like that, is it?"

"Madness can be handed down to men or women equally," said the physician gravely.

Claire rose suddenly, pushing back her chair so abruptly that it overturned and fell to the ground. She was very pale and the nervous motions of her fingers were very apparent.

"You—you will not be long, will you?" she begged. "Mrs. Thompson will be here in a few minutes now."

"One glass of port, and I will be with you," declared Sir Alington. "To see this wonderful Mrs. Thompson's performance is what I have come for, is it not? Ha, ha! Not that I needed any inducement." He bowed.

Claire gave a faint smile of acknowledgment and passed out of the room with Mrs. Eversleigh.

"Afraid I've been talking shop,"

remarked the physician as he resumed his seat. "Forgive me, my dear fellow."

"Not at all," said Trent perfunctorily.

He looked strained and worried. For the first time Dermot felt an outsider in the company of his friend. Between these two was a secret that even an old friend might not share. And yet the whole thing was fantastic and incredible. What had he to go upon? Nothing but a couple of glances and a woman's nervousness.

They lingered over their wine but a very short time, and arrived up in the drawing-room just as Mrs. Thompson was announced.

The medium was a plump middle-aged woman, atrociously dressed in magenta velvet, with a loud, rather common voice.

"Hope I'm not late, Mrs. Trent," she said cheerily. "You did say nine o'clock, didn't you?"

"You are quite punctual, Mrs. Thompson," said Claire in her sweet, slightly husky voice. "This is our little circle."

No further introductions were made, as was evidently the custom. The medium swept them all with a shrewd, penetrating eye.

"I hope we shall get some good results," she remarked briskly. "I can't tell you how I hate it when I go out and I can't give satisfaction, so to speak. It just makes me mad. But I think Shiromako (my Japanese control, you know) will be

able to get through all right tonight. I'm feeling ever so fit, and I refused the welsh rarebit, fond of cheese though I am."

Dermot listened, half-amused, half-disgusted. How prosaic the whole thing was! And yet, was he not judging foolishly? Everything, after all, was natural—the powers claimed by mediums were natural powers, as yet imperfectly understood. A great surgeon might be wary of indigestion on the eve of a delicate operation. Why not Mrs. Thompson?

Chairs were arranged in a circle, lights so that they could conveniently be raised or lowered. Dermot noticed that there was no question of *tests*, or of Sir Alington satisfying himself as to the conditions of the *séance*. Not this business of Mrs. Thompson was only a blind. Sir Alington was here for quite another purpose. Claire's mother, Dermot remembered, had died abroad. There had been some mystery about her. . . . Hereditary. . . .

With a jerk he forced his mind back to the surroundings of the moment.

Everyone took their places, and the lights were turned out, all but a small red-shaded one on a far table.

For a while nothing was heard but the low even breathing of the medium. Gradually it grew more and more stertorous. Then, with a suddenness that made Dermot jump, a loud rap came from the

far end of the room. It repeated from the other side. Then a perfect crescendo of raps was heard. They died away, and a sudden high peal of mocking laughter rang through the room.

Then silence, broken by a voice utterly unlike that of Mrs. Thompson, high-pitched, quaintly inflected.

"I am here, gentlemen," it said. "Yess, I am here. You wish ask me things?"

"Who are you? Shiromako?"

"Yess. I Shiromako. I pass over long ago. I work. I very happy."

Further details of Shiromako's life followed. It was all very flat and uninteresting, and Dermot had heard it often before. Everyone was happy, very happy. Messages were given from vaguely described relatives, the description being so loosely worded as to fit almost any contingency. An elderly lady, the mother of someone present, held the floor for some time, imparting copy book maxims with an air of refreshing novelty hardly borne out by her subject matter.

"Someone else want to get through now," announced Shiromako. "Got a very important message for one of the gentlemen."

There was a pause, and then a new voice spoke, prefacing its remarks with an evil demoniacal chuckle.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Better not go home. Take my advice."

"Who are you speaking to?" asked Trent.

"One of you three. I shouldn't go home if I were him. Danger! Blood! Not very much blood—quite enough. No, don't go home." Fainter, now. "*Don't go home!*"

It died away completely. Dermot felt his blood tingling. He was convinced that the warning was meant for him. Somehow or other, there was danger abroad tonight.

There was a sigh from the medium, and then a groan. She was coming round. The lights were turned on, and presently she sat upright, her eyes blinking a little.

"Go off well, my dear? I hope so."

"Very good indeed, thank you, Mrs. Thompson."

"Shiromako, I suppose?"

"Yes, and others."

Mrs. Thompson yawned.

"I'm dead beat. Absolutely down and out. Does fairly take it out of you. Well, I'm glad it was a success. I was a bit afraid something disagreeable might happen. There's a queer feel about this room tonight."

She glanced over each ample shoulder in turn, and then shrugged them uncomfortably.

"I don't like it," she said. "Any sudden deaths among any of you people lately?"

"What do you mean—among us?"

"Near relatives—dear friends? No? Well, if I wanted to be melodramatic, I'd say that there was death in the air tonight. There, it's only my nonsense. Good-bye, Mrs.

Trent. I'm glad you've been satisfied."

Mrs. Thompson in her magenta velvet gown went out.

"I hope you've been interested, Sir Alington," murmured Claire.

"A most interesting evening, my dear lady. Many thanks for the opportunity. Let me wish you good-night. You are all going on to a dance, are you not?"

"Won't you come with us?"

"No, no. I make it a rule to be in bed by half-past eleven. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Eversleigh. Ah! Dermot, I rather want to have a word with you. Can you come with me now? You can rejoin the others at the Grafton Galleries."

"Certainly, Uncle. I'll meet you there then, Trent."

Very few words were exchanged between uncle and nephew during the short drive to Harley Street. Sir Alington made a semi-apology for dragging Dermot away, and assured him that he would only detain him a few minutes.

"Shall I keep the car for you, my boy?" he asked, as they alighted.

"Oh, don't bother, uncle. I'll pick up a taxi."

"Very good. I don't like to keep Charlson up later than I can help. Good-night, Charlson. Now where the devil did I put my key?"

The car glided away as Sir Alington stood on the steps searching his pockets.

"Must have left it in my other coat," he said at length. "Ring the

bell, will you? Johnson is still up, I dare say."

The imperturbable Johnson did indeed open the door within sixty seconds.

"Mislaid my key, Johnson," explained Sir Alington. "Bring a couple of whiskies and sodas into the library."

"Very good, Sir Alington."

The physician strode on into the library and turned on the lights. He motioned to Dermot to close the door.

"I won't keep you long, Dermot, but there's just something I want to say to you. Is it my fancy, or have you a certain—*tendresse*, shall we say, for Mrs. Jack Trent?"

The blood rushed to Dermot's face.

"Jack Trent is my best friend."

"Pardon me, but that is hardly answering my question. I dare say that you consider my views on divorce and such matters highly puritanical, but I must remind you that you are my only near relative and my heir."

"There is no question of a divorce," said Dermot angrily.

"There certainly is not, for a reason which I understand perhaps better than you do. That particular reason I cannot give you now, but I do wish to warn you. She is not for you."

The young man faced his uncle's gaze steadily.

I do understand—and permit me to say, perhaps better than you

think. I know the reason for your presence at dinner tonight."

"Eh?" The physician was clearly startled. "How did you know that?"

"Call it a guess, sir. I am right, am I not, when I say that you were there in your—professional capacity?"

Sir Alington strode up and down.

"You are quite right, Dermot. I could not, of course, have told you so myself, though I am afraid it will soon be common property."

Dermot's heart contracted.

"You mean that you have—made up your mind?"

"Yes, there is insanity in the family—on the mother's side. A sad case—a very sad case."

"I can't believe it, sir."

"I dare say not. To the layman there are few if any signs apparent."

"And to the expert?"

"The evidence is conclusive. In such a case the patient must be placed under restraint as soon as possible."

"My God!" breathed Dermot. "But you can't shut anyone up for nothing at all."

"My dear Dermot! Cases are only placed under restraint when their being at large would result in danger to the community."

"Danger?"

"Very grave danger. In all probability a peculiar form of homicidal mania. It was so in the mother's case."

Dermot turned away with a groan, burying his face in his hands. Claire—white and golden Claire!

"In the circumstances," continued the physician comfortably, "I felt it incumbent on me to warn you."

"Claire," murmured Dermot. "My poor Claire."

"Yes, indeed, we must all pity her."

Suddenly Dermot raised his head.

"I say I don't believe it. Doctors make mistakes. Everyone knows that. And they're always keen on their own speciality."

"My dear Dermot," cried Sir Alington angrily.

"I tell you I don't believe it—and anyway, even if it is so, I don't care. I love Claire. If she will come with me, I shall take her away—far away—out of the reach of meddling physicians. I shall guard her, care for her, shelter her with my love."

"You will do nothing of the sort. Are you mad?" Dermot laughed scornfully.

"You would say so."

"Understand me, Dermot." Sir Alington's face was red with suppressed passion. "If you do this thing—this shameful thing—I shall withdraw the allowance I am now making you; and I shall make a new will leaving all I possess to various hospitals."

"Do as you please with your damned money," said Dermot in a

low voice. "I shall have the woman I love."

"A woman who—"

"Say a word against her and, by God, I'll kill you!" cried Dermot.

A slight chink of glasses made them both swing round. Unheard by them in the heat of their argument, Johnson had entered with a tray of glasses. His face was the imperturbable one of the good servant, but Dermot wondered just exactly how much he had overheard.

"That'll do, Johnson," said Sir Alington curtly. "You can go to bed."

"Thank you, sir. Good-night, sir."

Johnson withdrew.

The two men looked at each other. The momentary interruption had calmed the storm.

"Uncle" said Dermot. "I shouldn't have spoken to you as I did. I can quite see that from your point of view you are perfectly right. But I have loved Claire Trent for a long time. The fact that Jack Trent is my best friend has hitherto stood in the way of my ever speaking of love to Claire herself. But in these circumstances that fact no longer counts. The idea that any monetary conditions can deter me is absurd. I think we've both said all there is to be said. Good-night."

"Dermot—"

"It is really no good arguing further. Good-night, Uncle Alington."

He went out quickly, shutting the door behind him. The hall was in darkness. He passed through it, opened the front door and emerged into the street, banging the door behind him.

A taxi had just deposited a fare at a house farther along the street and Dermot hailed it, and drove to the Grafton Galleries.

In the door of the ballroom he stood for a minute bewildered, his head spinning. The raucous jazz music, the smiling women—it was as though he had stepped into another world.

Had he dreamed it all? Impossible that that grim conversation with his uncle should have really taken place. There was Claire floating past, like a lily in her white and silver gown that fitted sheathlike to her slenderness. She smiled at him, her face calm and serene. Surely it was all a dream.

The dance had stopped. Presently she was near him, smiling up into his face. As in a dream he asked her to dance. She was in his arms now, the raucous melodies had begun again.

He felt her flag a little.

"Tired? Do you want to stop?" "If you don't mind. Can we go somewhere where we can talk. There is something I want to say to you."

Not a dream. He came back to earth with a bump. Could he ever have thought her face calm and serene? It was haunted with an-

xiety, with dread. How much did she know?

He found a quiet corner, and they sat down side by side.

"Well," he said, assuming a lightness he did not feel. "You said you had something you wanted to say to me?"

"Yes." Her eyes were cast down. She was playing nervously with the tassel of her gown. "It's difficult—"

"Tell me, Claire."

"It's just this. I want you to—to go away for a time."

He was astonished. Whatever he had expected, it was not this.

"You want me to go away? Why?"

"It's best to be honest, isn't it? I know that you are a—a gentleman and my friend. I want you to go away because I—I have let myself get fond of you."

"Claire."

Her words left him dumb—tongue-tied.

"Please do not think that I am conceited enough to fancy that you—would ever be likely to fall in love with me. It is only that—I am not very happy—and—oh! I would rather you went away."

"Claire, don't you know that I have cared—cared damably—ever since I met you?"

She lifted startled eyes to his face.

"You cared? You have cared a long time?"

"Since the beginning."

"Oh! she cried. "Why didn't you

tell me? Then? When I could have come to you! Why tell me now when it's too late. No, I'm mad—I don't know what I'm saying. I could never have come to you."

"Claire, what did you mean when you said 'now that it's too late?' Is it—is it because of my uncle? What he knows?"

She nodded, the tears running down her face.

"Listen, Claire, you're not to believe all that. You're not to think about it. Instead, you will come away with me. I will look after you—keep you safe always."

His arms went round her. He drew her to him, felt her tremble at his touch. Then suddenly she wrenched herself free.

"Oh, no, please. Can't you see I couldn't now. It would be ugly—ugly—ugly. All along I've wanted to be good—and now—it would be ugly as well."

He hesitated, baffled by her words. She looked at him appealingly.

"Please," she said. "I want to be good. . . ."

Without a word, Dermot got up and left her. For the moment he was touched and racked by her words beyond argument. He went for his hat and coat, running into Trent as he did so.

"Hallo, Dermot, you're off early."

"Yes, I'm not in the mood for dancing tonight."

"It's a rotten night," said Trent. "But you haven't got my worries."

Dermot had a sudden panic that Trent might be going to confide in him. Not that—anything but that!

"Well, so long," he said hurriedly. "I'm off home."

"Home, eh? What about the warning of the spirits?"

"I'll risk that. Good-night, Jack."

Dermot's flat was not far away. He walked there, feeling the need of the cool night air to calm his fevered brain. He let himself in with his key and switched on the light in the bedroom.

And all at once, for the second time that night, the feeling of the Red Signal surged over him. So overpowering was it that for the moment it swept even Claire from his mind.

Danger! He was in danger. At this very moment, in this very room!

He tried in vain to ridicule himself free of the fear. Perhaps his efforts were secretly half-hearted. So far, the Red Signal had given him timely warning which had enabled him to avoid disaster. Smiling a little at his own superstition, he made a careful tour of the flat. It was possible that some malefactor had got in and was lying concealed there. But his search revealed nothing. His man, Milson, was away, and the flat was absolutely empty.

He returned to his bedroom and undressed slowly, frowning to himself. The sense of danger was acute as ever. He went to a drawer to get out a handkerchief, and suddenly

stood stock still. There was an unfamiliar lump in the middle of the drawer.

His quick nervous fingers tore aside the handkerchiefs and took out the object concealed beneath them.

It was a revolver.

With the utmost astonishment Dermot examined it keenly. It was of a somewhat unfamiliar pattern, and one shot had been fired from it lately. Beyond that he could make nothing of it. Someone had placed it in that drawer that very evening. It had not been there when he dressed for dinner—he was sure of that.

He was about to replace it in the drawer, when he was startled by a bell ringing. It rang again and again, sounding unusually loud in the quietness of the empty flat.

Who could be coming to the front door at this hour? And only one answer came to the question—an answer instinctive and persistent.

*Danger—danger—danger.*

Led by some instinct for which he did not account, Dermot switched off his light, slipped on an overcoat that lay across a chair, and opened the hall door.

Two men stood outside. Beyond them Dermot caught sight of a blue uniform. A policeman!

"Mr. West?" asked one of the two men.

It seemed to Dermot that ages elapsed before he answered. In real-

ity it was only a few seconds before he replied in a very fair imitation of his servant's expressionless voice:

"Mr. West hasn't come in yet."

"Hasn't come in yet, eh? Very well, then, I think we'd better come in and wait for him."

"No, you don't."

"See here, my man, I'm Inspector Verall of Scotland Yard, and I've got a warrant for the arrest of your master. You can see it if you like."

Dermot perused the proffered paper, or pretended to do so, asking in a dazed voice:

"What for? What's he done?"

"Murder. Sir Alington West of Harley Street."

His brain in a whirl, Dermot fell back before his redoubtable visitors. He went into the sitting-room and switched on the light. The inspector followed him.

"Have a search round," he directed the other man. Then he turned to Dermot.

"You stay here, my man. No slipping off to warn your master. What's your name, by the way?"

"Milson, sir."

"What time do you expect your master in, Milson?"

"I don't know, sir, he was going to a dance, I believe. At the Grafton Galleries."

"He left there just under an hour ago. Sure he's not been back here?"

"I don't think so, sir. I fancy I should have heard him come in."

At this moment the second man came in from the adjoining room.

In his hand he carried the revolver. He took it across to the inspector in some excitement. An expression of satisfaction flitted across the latter's face.

"That settles it," he remarked. "Must have slipped in and out without your hearing him. He's hooked it by now. I'd better be off. Cawley, you stay here, in case he should come back again, and you can keep an eye on this fellow. He may know more about his master than he pretends."

The inspector hustled off. Dermot endeavored to get the details of the affair from Cawley, who was quite ready to be talkative.

"Pretty clear case," he vouchsafed. "The murder was discovered almost immediately. Johnson, the man-servant, had only just gone up to bed when he fancied he heard a shot, and came down again. Found Sir Alington dead, shot through the heart. He rang us up at once and we came along and heard his story."

"Which made it a pretty clear case?" ventured Dermot.

"Absolutely. This young West came in with his uncle and they were quarrelling when Johnson brought in the drinks. The old boy was threatening to make a new will, and your master was talking about shooting him. Not five minutes later the shot was heard. Oh! yes, clear enough."

Clear enough indeed. Dermot's heart sank as he realized the over-

whelming evidence against him. And no way out save flight. He set his wits to work. Presently he suggested making a cup of tea. Cawley assented readily enough. He had already searched the flat and knew there was no back entrance.

Dermot was permitted to depart to the kitchen. Once there he put the kettle on, and chinked cups and saucers industriously. Then he stole swiftly to the window and lifted the sash. The flat was on the second floor, and outside the window was the small wire lift used by tradesmen which ran up and down on its steel cable.

Like a flash Dermot was outside the window and swinging himself down the wire rope. It cut into his hands, making them bleed, but he went on desperately.

A few minutes later he was emerging cautiously from the back of the block. Turning the corner, he cannoned into a figure standing by the sidewalk. To his utter amazement he recognized Jack Trent. Trent was fully alive to the perils of the situation.

"My God! Dermot! Quick, don't hang about here."

Taking him by the arm, he led him down a by-street, then down another. A lonely taxi was sighted and hailed and they jumped in, Trent giving the man his own address.

"Safest place for the moment. There we can decide what to do next to put those fools off the track.

I came round here, hoping to be able to warn you before the police got here."

"I didn't even know that you had heard of it. Jack, you don't believe—"

"Of course not, old fellow, not for one minute. I know you far too well. All the same, it's a nasty business for you. They came round asking questions—what time you got to the Grafton Galleries, when you left, and so on. Dermot, who could have done the old boy in?"

"I can't imagine. Whoever did it put the revolver in my drawer, I suppose. Must have been watching us pretty closely."

"That *séance* business was damned funny. '*Don't go home*.' Meant for poor old West. He did go home, and got shot."

"It applies to me too," said Dermot. "I went home and found a planted revolver and a police inspector."

"Well, I hope it doesn't get me too," said Trent. "Here we are."

He paid the taxi, opened the door with his latch-key, and guided Dermot up the dark stairs to his den, a small room on the first floor.

He threw open the door and Dermot walked in, while Trent switched on the light, and came to join him.

"Pretty safe here for the time being," he remarked. "Now we can get our heads together and decide what is best to be done."

"I've made a fool of myself," said

Dermot suddenly. "I ought to have faced it out. I see more clearly now. The whole thing's a plot. What the devil are you laughing at?"

For Trent was leaning back in his chair, shaking with unrestrained mirth. There was something horrible in the sound—something horrible, too, about the man altogether.

There was a curious light in his eyes.

"A damned clever plot," he gasped out. "Dermot, you're done for."

He drew the telephone towards him.

"What are you going to do?" asked Dermot.

"Ring up Scotland Yard. Tell 'em their bird's here—safe under lock and key. Yes, I locked the door when I came in and the key's in my pocket. No good looking at that other door behind me. That leads into Claire's room, and she always locks it on her side. She's afraid of me, you know. Been afraid of me a long time. She always knows when I'm thinking about that knife—a long sharp knife. No, you don't—"

Dermot had been about to make a rush at him, but the other had suddenly produced a revolver.

"That's the second of them," chuckled Trent. "I put the first in your drawer—after shooting old West with it—What are you looking at over my head? That door? It's no use, even if Claire was to

open it—and she might to *you*—I'd shoot you before you got there. Not in the heart—not to kill, just wing you, so that you couldn't get away. I'm a jolly good shot, you know. I saved your life once. More fool I. No, no, I want you hanged—yes, hanged. It isn't you I want the knife for. It's Claire—pretty Claire, so white and soft. Old West knew. That's what he was here for tonight, to see if I was mad or not. He wanted to shut me up—so that I shouldn't get at Claire with the knife. I was very cunning. I took his latch-key and yours too: I slipped away from the dance as soon as I got there. I saw you come out of his house, and I went in: I shot him and came away at once. Then I went to your place and left the revolver. I was at the Grafton Galleries again almost as soon as you were, and I put the latch-key back in your coat pocket when I was saying good-night to you. I don't mind telling you all this. There's no one else to hear, and when you're being hanged I'd like you to know I did it. . . . There's not a loophole of escape. It makes me laugh . . . God, how it makes me laugh! What are you thinking of? What the devil are you looking at?"

"I'm thinking of some words you quoted just now. You'd have done better, Trent, not to come home."

"What do you mean?"

"Look behind you?"

Trent spun round. In the doorway of the communicating room

stood Claire—and Inspector Ve-  
rall. . . .

Trent was quick. The revolver spoke just once—and found its mark. He fell forward across the table. The inspector sprang to his side, as Dermot stared at Claire in a dream. Thoughts flashed through his brain disjointedly. His uncle—misunderstanding—the divorce laws of England which would

never free Claire from an insane husband—"we must all pity her"—the plot between her and Sir Alington which the cunning of Trent had seen through—her cry to him, "Ugly—ugly—ugly!" Yes, but now—

The inspector straightened up.

"Dead," he said vexedly.

"Yes," Dermot heard himself saying, "he was always a good shot. . . ."



# Quentin Reynolds

## Never Trust a Murderer

*Quentin Reynolds is a friend of great men all over the world, but even more important he is a friend of little men all over the world. Show us a writer who dedicates his life to fighting evil—dictatorship, intolerance, bigotry, crime—and we will show you a detective-story writer, and a good one.*

THE THING I FIRST LIKED ABOUT Detective (First Grade) Max Friedman was that he looked like a cop. He was a very big guy who moved rather slowly, but he didn't think slowly and he was acknowledged by everyone on the force to be the best homicide cop in New York. He had a flattened nose, a souvenir of his early days when he'd been a free-swinging member of the riot squad. He had big feet and he wore big thick-soled shoes and even in plain clothes "copper" stuck out all over him. He didn't care about pottery created during the Ming Dynasty; he didn't have a flower garden; he didn't give a damn for poetry or etchings and he never voted. He was just a cop.

Max was a quiet man, who liked to listen a lot more than he liked to talk. When he did talk he talked about the only subject he knew a great deal about—the subject of murderers. Otherwise he was a very normal sort of person. On his day off he'd go to a ball game or to the race track. He was a great fan

of the Giants and he also liked the Empire track because it was small and it was one of the few tracks in the world where you could actually see the horses running. He liked movies too. Oddly enough he liked crook movies the best.

"What I like about them," he once told me, grinning, "is that in those kind of movies the crook or the murderer always gets caught. Now with us it isn't that way. Often our cases end up with a lot of loose ends, and the guy we are after is maybe sitting in Mexico City laughing his head off at us."

"But, Max," I protested, "New York has the best homicide record of any city in the world except London."

"A lot of them have got away from us since I joined the force," he said darkly. "For instance, the guy who killed Elwell. Remember that case? A bridge player named Joseph Elwell? We had a thousand clues, ran 'em all down, and where do we end up? Behind the eight ball, that's where."

"The Elwell case? That was back in 1922."

"It was 1920," he corrected. "But murder is murder whether it's in 1920 or 1945."

"You hate murderers, don't you?"

He looked faintly puzzled. "No, I got nothing against them. My job is to catch them. If I don't catch them it means I've done a lousy job. But I don't hate 'em."

"But you catch most of them?"

"Oh, sure," he said carelessly. "I've sent plenty of them to the chair since I've been on homicide. You want to go to Empire today?"

"I always want to go to Empire," I told him, and then I phoned my office and said that I wouldn't be working this afternoon. I work for a very tough city editor who knows all the lies. The one thing that baffles him is the truth. I told him I was taking the afternoon off to go to Empire, and that startled him so that he said, "Okay. I got a tip on the fourth. A goat called Shoo-fly. Bet me five across."

We walked out of the big gloomy-looking building on Centre Street, and the sun hit us right in the face and it felt good. We got into a squad car, which surprised me.

"This is a business trip," Friedman grinned.

"You going to pick someone up at the Empire track?"

"I hope so." The car tore up Fourth Avenue. An old-timer

named Hammond was driving and he seemed to take a grim delight in seeing how close he could come to brushing very large trucks.

"It's a suspect in the Low case," Friedman said. "You been following that one?"

"Not very closely. I know that an old guy was shot, and you coppers have been running in circles looking for someone to pin it on."

"That's right," Friedman said. "Here's the story: Robert Low was a very decent citizen who lived with his eighteen-year-old son in a five-room apartment in Gramercy Square. On a Thursday night Low and his son went out to dinner and then to the theater. It was their cook's night off. They came back to the flat, and as Low was about to put his key into the lock he noticed that a light was on inside. He remembered that he had turned the light out when he and the boy had left. The cook didn't sleep in, so he knew she couldn't have turned on the light. Low was a cautious man. He told his son to run downstairs and get a cop. The kid lit out. There was no cop around Gramercy Square. He had to go over to Third Avenue. He came back in about ten minutes with a cop. They went upstairs and there they found the old gent lying dead; shot right between the eyes. Evidently someone had burgled the flat and then, as he came out, found Low there. Maybe Low took a punch at him."

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"You didn't find the gun?"

"Yeah, we found the gun. I was there with my men a few minutes later. It was a warm night and there were quite a few people around the Square. A couple of them said they had seen a small man throw something over the iron railing that keeps the vulgar unwashed from going into Gramercy Park. That's all we had to go on: a small man and this gun with no prints on it."

"We traced the gun, all right. It had been sold by a pawnbroker named George Maney. He described his customer as a small well-dressed man. He had a permit to carry the gun, and the pawnbroker had registered the name and number. It belonged to a jeweler whose own flat had been burgled about six months before. He had reported the loss of the gun. Evidently the two jobs had been done by the same man."

I winced as we were almost mouse-trapped by an eight-ton brewery truck and a streetcar. "You don't have much to go on," I said.

"Not much," Friedman admitted sadly. "But the pawnbroker added something. The gun cost fifteen dollars, and when the customer paid for it, he said to the pawnbroker, 'If you want to make that grow, put it on Firebug in the fourth at Belmont today.' They were running at Belmont then. I asked the pawnbroker if he had bet on Firebug and he said he hadn't. He was

sorry about that too, he told me, because Firebug won and paid forty-two dollars . . . so at least we knew a little more about the man. He was small, dark, and apparently he liked to bet on horses."

"Now we've got a file down at headquarters on every known criminal. That rang a small bell, not a very loud one. Before I got into plain clothes I was working with the loft squad. I knew most of the crooks around then. A lot of them turned square. A lot of them hadn't. Some of them I'd done small favors for. Anyhow I called a few of them in and asked them about small, dark man who bet on horses and who specialized in apartment burglaries. I finally came up with Jack Rees."

"This Rees filled the bill all right except for the murder angle. He was strictly a burglar and not in the killing business at all. He was a very successful horse player, they said. He'd make a pile, then shack up with some girl in a really first-class hotel. He liked to live good. When his dough ran out he'd break into a place, lift enough jewelry to cash to give him a stake and then go back to the race track."

"We're going to pick him up?"

"I hope so," Friedman said. "After all, Empire is the only track that's open. Of course he probably isn't our man. Flat men seldom carry guns, and no one has suggested that this Jack Rees was ever a biff guy."

"What's a biff guy?" I asked.

"On homicide we call professional murderers biff guys. Vincent Coll was a biff guy. So was Lepke, and that mob O'Dwyer got in Brooklyn was made up of biff guys."

"We're getting near there, Max." I told him. "Have that ape up in front stop leaning on that siren or we'll scare the horses to death."

It was a good day for racing, and, as I said, Empire to me is the best track in the world. First we went into the dining room to see Joe and Harry Stevens. As everyone knows they run the restaurants at the tracks and run the hot-dog business at ball games. I said to Joe Stevens, "What's good today, Joe?"

His eyes lighted up and he said, "The liver and bacon."

I said, "I mean what's good to bet on?"

"Bet on the liver and bacon," he said in disgust. "Never bet on anything that can talk."

"Horses can't talk," I reminded him.

"Jockeys can," he said. The Stevens brothers just don't believe in gambling. They think betting on horses is a very silly thing to do. I agree with them but I have the courage to ignore my principles.

"You seen a man around here named Jack Rees?" Friedman asked.

"Rees? A small, dark man? Yes, he's around here every day. I remember him because he's about

the only one around who orders champagne. He's a pretty big better, I think. You'll find him somewhere around the clubhouse."

We went outside and got a table. The best of Empire is that you can sit at a table and the horses are practically right in your lap. You can really see them run at Empire. Friedman knew a lot of people there at the track. He knew the touts and he knew the runners; the men who take your money and stand in line at the windows to make your bets for you. He asked each one of them if he knew a man named Jack Rees. California Tommy, who has been a runner for thirty years, said he did the running for Rees. Sure, he knew him. A swell guy. A heavy tipper. He was around somewhere. The second race was coming up now and I liked a horse named Kate's Pride.

"He hasn't got a chance," Friedman said.

"He's got four legs. That's all the rest of them have," I told him.

"And Jimmy Crichton up on him," Max snorted. "That guy could hold an elephant away from a bale of hay. I'll take the favorite."

"Blue Grass? Hell, he's even money!" I hate betting on favorites.

"Where can you get better interest on your money?" Max said, giving California Tommy five dollars to bet on Blue Grass. I bet on Kate's Pride and watched the dog throw his jock at the gate, get off to a three-length lead and then start

to sulk. She sulked herself into coming home last. Maybe she was no good and maybe that jock was holding her in. Blue Grass won.

Friedman won the third too, and then in the fourth I made a bet for the boss on Shoofly and, trying to recoup, bet twenty for myself. Friedman went along too. Shoofly ran as if they'd filled him with benzedrine. He won by four lengths, laughing, and paid \$12.40. Everybody was happy.

"Well," Friedman sighed, "let's go to work."

California Tommy pointed out a small dark man to us and said that was Jack Rees. He was with a very good-looking blonde who looked good even there with the sun shining on her. There are plenty of girls who won't go to the track. That sun brings out wrinkles. Max went up to them and showed his badge to Rees.

"You mind coming along?" he asked mildly. "We want to talk to you at headquarters."

Rees laughed. "Talk to me, copper? Is it a crime to beat the races? That's all I been doing."

"It's a crime to drop in people's houses uninvited and help yourself to little trinkets."

"You got the wrong man, copper," Rees said, not a bit disturbed. "Let me show you something."

He pulled out a wallet, and I blinked. It was filled with hundred-dollar bills. There must have been thirty of them there.

"I got plenty more too," Rees said. "You can look up my bank account. Now what is a man loaded with dough like this doing going around lifting little trinkets?"

"We could be wrong," Friedman said sadly. "But if we are you won't have to stay long; let's get going."

"You're being very silly," the blonde said angrily. "Jack is an insurance man. I've known him for ages."

"How long is ages, miss?" Max asked mildly.

"Well . . . oh, a couple of months," she said.

"Honey, I'll do what the man says." Rees was debonair and unworried. "Now let me mark the rest of your card, and you bet a hundred to win for me on these horses."

He marked the card for her and then stood up. We walked out of the place talking about the horses. Rees was all right, I decided, and this time Friedman had stubbed his toe. Rees had a nice smile and he didn't mind a bit going down to headquarters.

"What the hell! You got a job to do," he told Max. "I'm clean. I got nothing to worry about. When I was a kid, I admit, I was a bit wild. Sometimes I'd go along with the boys and maybe snatch some cigarettes or candy from a shop. But that was a long time ago."

"What insurance company do you work for?" Friedman asked.

"That's a stall to make that doll

of mine happy," he laughed. "I make my living at the track. You know if you work hard enough at it you can beat the horses. I've got a clocker who's there every morning. I get the best information there is and I don't play hunches or gray horses or fillies in the spring meetings. This is a business with me."

"You do all right?"

"I do all right," Rees said.

We got to headquarters and Max questioned him. No rough stuff; Friedman just questioned him. Low was killed on the night of September 9th—three weeks before.

"Where were you on the night of September 9th?" Friedman asked.

"I have no idea," Rees said clamly. "Where were you? Do you remember?"

"No, I don't," Friedman admitted, and I saw a reluctant look of admiration come into his eyes. This man knew the right answers.

Friedman was patient. He asked questions for two hours. Rees was tired and a little irritable now. But he answered everything with apparent frankness. Meanwhile they'd brought in the pawnbroker. Friedman took Rees downstairs to the stage where they have the line-up. First he put a light coat on him and a slouch hat. That's how the man had been dressed who'd bought the gun. He put Rees into a line with six others—all big men, I noticed. The lights were turned on.

Friedman said to the pawnbroker, "Ever seen any of those men before?"

"Sure, sure," the pawnbroker said excitedly. "I seen that man—the one on the end there."

"What?" Friedman exploded.

The man on the end of the line was Detective Charles Armstrong. Armstrong almost had apoplexy.

"Sure," the pawnbroker said. "I seen him last week. He came into my shop to buy a saxophone."

"A saxophone?" Friedman roared. Armstrong grew red in the face. He'd never live that down.

"You see any of the others?" Friedman asked.

The pawnbroker looked intently. "I think so. That little guy. That's the one all right who bought a gun off of me. He's the one who gave me the tip on Firebug. Yeah, that's the guy, all right."

"That's all," Friedman snapped. Then he brought Rees upstairs for more questioning. He wasn't so afable now.

"You'd had a bad session at the track and you were broke," he snapped. "You needed a stake. So you broke into a flat on Gramercy Square. Coming out, you bumped into the man who lived there. Maybe he took a punch at you; his knuckles were skinned. So you let him have it. Here's the gun you used."

"You're nuts," Rees said tersely. There were beads of sweat on his forehead and he was clenching his

hands. "You're nuts," he almost yelled.

Friedman's questions came faster now, like trip hammers. He asked a thousand questions that had nothing to do with the murder. Where had Rees gone to school? What church did he go to as a kid? What did his father do for a living? Rees was weary now and his eyes shifted away from Friedman's hard gaze. This was all part of a pattern. I'd seen Friedman do it before.

"You killed him." Friedman's voice was like ice.

"I didn't," Rees cried out.

"You bungled it too, you dope," Friedman snapped. "You should have stuck to your little petty-larceny jobs. You shouldn't have used a gun. You don't know how to handle one. You even left your fingerprints on this, the gun you used."

"I wore gloves," Rees shouted almost automatically. And then it was over. A look of horror came over his face as he realized what he'd said.

Then it came out, but fast. Sure he'd done the job, Rees admitted, but he didn't mean to shoot the old man. He had been surprised when he'd come out of the flat to find Low waiting, and Low had swung at him. They struggled and the gun went off accidentally.

"That was a hell of a good shot considering it was accidental," Friedman snapped. "Caught him right between the eyes. Take the

bum away," he added, and they dragged the now gibbering Rees to a cell.

"You got it all down?" Friedman said to a stenographer who had been taking notes. He nodded. "Nice to have a confession. It makes things easier for the D.A."

"His lawyer will say you beat it out of him," I suggested.

"That's why I let you sit in on this," Friedman grinned. "You can testify that the questioning was gentle and all according to Marquis of Queensberry rules. . . ."

That's how it was. Rees hired the most expensive criminal lawyer in town but none of his tricks worked. Rees was up before Judge Wallace, and Wallace never did like house-breakers who carried guns. Wallace threw the book at him and gave him the chair. Now if that was all there was to the story, it would hardly be worth the telling. Men like Max Friedman break murder cases every week in New York. It's routine to them. But what followed wasn't quite routine.

I met Friedman a week before Rees was scheduled to walk into that little square room and sit down in the only unoccupied chair in it. We got to talking of this and that, and finally he talked about Rees.

"Funny thing," Friedman said thoughtfully, "Fred Olsen phoned me yesterday—you know Olsen, the Sing Sing warden—well, he asked me could I get Rees two or three

weeks reprieve. I asked him if he had any new evidence, and he said he hadn't. He wanted me to go to Judge Wallace and have him recommend that Rees be granted a stay. The way it works out in this state is that if the judge who did the sentencing asks the governor for a stay, it is granted automatically. Olsen made quite an issue of it, but he wouldn't give any reason. So I told him to go to hell."

"I wonder what his reason was?"

"I don't know," Friedman said. "I'll know next week, though. You know the rule in this state. One member of the police force has to attend all executions to act as an official witness. So I'm elected."

"Do you like watching executions?" I asked curiously.

Friedman shrugged. "Frankly, murderers aren't people to me. They're rats and I'm afraid that I don't have any feeling about them."

Well, he went up to the big house on the river and when he came back, I dropped in to see him. I was a bit curious about that strange request Olsen had made. I knew the warden, all right; he was a fine honest man. It wasn't like him to ask for a reprieve for a murderer. I asked Max what the score was.

"Kind of silly," Friedman grinned. "I got up there in time for dinner. I had dinner with Olsen. He told me the truth. It seems that men in the death house get some small privileges other prisoners don't get. For instance, if they can

pay for them they are allowed to have newspapers. Now Rees ordered one paper each day. Just one—the Racing Form. He'd study that damn' thing for hours and then pick horses. The guards thought he was nuts at first but then they noticed that the horses he picked usually won. So they started to bet on his selections, themselves.

"Well, he picked a few long shots, and the guards did all right stringing along with him. Olsen heard of it, too, and he started playing Rees's selections. But Olsen didn't start until a couple of weeks before Rees was scheduled to burn. Like all horse players he got awfully greedy. That's when he phoned me. He figured if he could keep Rees alive another few weeks he'd get rich. He was very unhappy when the time came to throw that switch, believe me."

"Did you see Rees before he was chilled?" I asked.

Friedman grinned, "Yeah, I saw him. In fact I took that last stroll with him. During the trial when he was on the stand he made a couple of nasty cracks aimed at me. Well, there was no reason why he should have loved me; after all, I convicted the guy. So I wasn't surprised to see his eyes gleam a bit when I walked into his cell. But then he got up and shook hands and said, 'No hard feelings, copper. You had to do it. That's your job. I just bet on a long shot that didn't come off, and I don't mind paying.'"

Friedman paused for a moment before going on. "We began the walk to that room. Rees, as calm as if he were walking to his box at Empire, said casually, 'Man alive, but I'd like to be at Belmont tomorrow. I got a real sleeper in the big stake.' I said, 'What the hell, Rees, how can the Whitney horse lose?' He said, 'You haven't been watching that filly of Hirsch Jacobs'. That Brooklyn Handicap is made for her. A little filly named Ginny R. Last time out, that was two months ago, she won a mile in 1:38 and she was looking over her shoulder at the finish. Six lengths she won by.' I said, 'Rees, you're out of your mind. She's the longest shot in the race. She's thirty to one. I like the Whitney horse.'

"By now," Friedman continued, "we'd reached the little green door. We walked into the death house. There was the usual crowd of reporters there, all looking a bit sick. I guess Rees and I were the only ones who didn't mind it. Rees said, 'Don't be a sucker, copper. This is my last tip. Bet the family jewels on the filly, and your wife will wear diamonds. The filly is ready, chum. Jacobs has been waiting for this spot. I know. Bet on Ginny R., copper...'"

"Well," Friedman said, "they

were the last words he spoke. Ten seconds later he was dead in the electric chair."

"Funny guy, that Rees," I said to Friedman. "Even sitting there in the chair, all he could think of was horses."

"You're wrong there," Friedman said to me. "Sitting there in the chair, all Rees could think of was how he hated me and how he could square things with me."

"What do you mean, Max?"

"Why, he was purposely giving me a bum tip, hoping I'd make a good bet on the horse and lose my shirt. You can never trust a murderer even when he's sitting in the chair."

"Then you didn't bet on the filly?"

"Do you think I'm crazy?" Friedman said angrily. "Of course not. I remembered that dirty look Rees gave me when I went into his cell. He didn't like me a bit. Besides, I'd never bet on a filly in the spring. No, I bet on the solid horse that Whitney owns. No matter how you doped the race, he figured to win . . ."

"How did the race come out?"

Friedman looked surprised. "Didn't you hear? Hell, the filly won and paid \$62.50. The Whitney horse finished last."



# Erle Stanley Gardner

## To Strike a Match

*The creator of Perry Mason tells the poignant story of a little coolie woman and what she did, in the days of the "devil's eggs," at the House of the Three Candles . . .*

THE LOVE OF LOYALTY ROAD IN Canton is a wide thoroughfare cut ruthlessly through the congested district in order to modernize the city. Occasional side streets feed the traffic of automobiles and rickshas into it, but back of these streets one enters the truly congested areas, where people live like sardines in a tin.

The Street of the Wild Chicken is so wide that one may travel down it in a ricksha. But within a hundred feet of the intersection of The Street of the Wild Chicken and The Love of Loyalty Road, one comes to *Tien Mah Hong*, which, being translated, means The Alley of the Sky Horse. And in *Tien Mah Hong* there is no room for even ricksha traffic. Two pedestrians wearing wide-brimmed hats must tilt their heads as they meet, so that the brims will not scrape as the wearers pass each other shoulder to shoulder.

Houses on each side of *Tien Mah Hong*, with balconies and windows abutting directly upon The Alley of the Sky Horse, give but little opportunity for privacy. The lives of

neighbors are laid bare with an intimacy of detail which would be inconceivable in a less congested community or a more occidental atmosphere. At night the peddlers of bean cakes, walking through The Sky Horse Alley, beat little drums to attract attention, and shout their wares with a cry which is like the howl of a wolf.

Leung Fah walked down The Sky Horse Alley with downcast eyes, as beffited a modest woman of the coolie class. Her face was utterly without expression. Not even the shrewdest student of human nature could have told from her outward appearance the thoughts which were seething within her breast.

It had been less than a month before that Leung Fah had clasped to her breast a morsel of humanity which represented all life's happiness, a warm, ragged bundle, a child without a father, a secret outlet for her mother love.

Then one night there had been a scream of sirens, a panic-stricken helter-skelter rush of shouting inhabitants, and over all, the omi-

nous, steady roar of airplane engines, a hideous undertone of sound which mounted until it became as the hum of a million metallic bees.

It is easy enough to advocate fleeing to a place of safety, but the narrow roads of Canton admit of no swift handling of crowds. And there are no places of safety. Moreover, the temperament of the Chinese makes it difficult to carry out any semblance of an air defense program. Death in one form or another is always jeering at their elbows. Why dignify one particular form of death by going to such great lengths, so far as precautions are concerned?

The devil's eggs began to fall from the sky in a screaming hail. Anti-aircraft guns roared a reply. Machine guns sputtered away hysterically. Through all the turmoil the enemy flyers went calmly about their business of murder, ignoring the frenzied, nervous attempts of an unprepared city to make some semblance of defense.

With fierce mother instinct, Leung Fah had held her baby to her breast, shielding it with her frail body, as though interposing a layer of flesh and bone would be of any avail against this "civilized" warfare which rained down from the skies.

The earth had rocked with a series of detonations, and then suddenly Leung Fah had been surrounded by a terrific noise, by

splintered timbers, dust and debris.

When she had wiped her eyes and looked at the little morsel of humanity in her arms, she had screamed in terrified anguish.

No one had known of Leung Fah's girl. Because she had no husband, she had kept her offspring as a secret; and because she slept in one of the poorest sections of the city, where people are as numerous and as transient as bats in a cave, she had been able to maintain her secret. Since no one had known of her child, no one had known of her loss. Night after night she had gone about her work, moving stolidly through the heat and stench of the city, her face an expressionless mask.

Sahm Seuh, the man who had only three fingers on his right hand, and whose eyes were cunning, moving as smoothly moist in their sockets as the tongue of a snake, had noticed her going about her work, and of late he had become exceedingly solicitous. She was not looking well. Was she perhaps sick? She no longer laughed, or paused to gossip in loud tones with the slave girls in the early morning hours before daylight. Was it perhaps that the money she was making was not sufficient. . . . Sahm Seuh's oily eyes slithered expressively. Perhaps that too could be remedied.

Because she had said nothing, because she had stared at him with eyes that saw not and ears that

heard not, her soul numbed by an anguish which made her as one who walks in sleep at the hour of the rat, Sahm Seuh grew bold.

Did she need money? Lots of money—gold money? Not the paper money of China, but gold which would enable her to be independent? *Aiii-ahh.* It was simple. So simple as only the striking of a match. And Sahm Seuh flipped his wrist in a quick motion and scratched a match into flame in order to illustrate his meaning. He went away then, leaving her to think the matter over.

That night as she moved through the narrow thoroughfares of the city her mind brooded upon the words of Sahm Seuh.

Canton is a sleepless city of noise. At times, during the summer months, there comes a slight ebb of activity during the first few hours after midnight, but it is an ebb which is barely perceptible to occidental ears. In the large Chinese cities people sleep in shifts because there is not enough room to accommodate them all at one time in houses. Those who are off-shift roam the streets, and because Chinese ears are impervious to noise, just as Chinese nostrils are immune to smells, the hubbub of conversation continues unabated.

Daylight was dawning, a murky, humid dawn which brought renewed heat to a city already steeped in its own emanations—a city of silent-winged mosquitoes, oppressive

and sweltering heat, unevaporated perspiration, and those odors which cling to China as an aura.

Sahm Seuh stood suddenly before her.

"That gold?" he asked. "Do you wish it?"

"I would strike a match," she said, tonelessly.

"Meet me," Sahm Seuh said "at the house on Sky Horse Alley where three candles burn. Open the door and climb the stairs. The time is tonight at the last minute of the hour of the dog."

And so, as one in a daze, Leung Fah turned down The Sky Horse Alley and shuffled along with leaden feet, her eyes utterly without expression, set in a face of wood . . .

Night found her turning into the The Alley of the Sky Horse.

In a house on the left a girl was playing a metallic-sounding Chinese harp. Ten steps back of her a bean peddler raised his voice in a long, howling "*o-w-w-w-w e-o-o-o.*" Fifty feet ahead, a family sought to scatter evil spirits by flinging lightened firecrackers from the balcony.

Leung Fah plodded on, circling a bonfire where paper imitation money, a model sedan chair, and slaves in effigy were being sent by means of fire to join the spirits of ancestors. Three candles flickered on the sidewalk in the heavy air of the hot night.

Leung Fah opened the door

and climbed the stairs. There was darkness ahead, only darkness. She entered a room, and sensed that others were present. She could hear their breathing, the restless motions of their bodies, the rustle of clothes, occasionally a nervous cough. The hour struck—the passing of the hour of the dog, and the beginning of the hour of the boar.

The voice of Sahm Seuh came from the darkness. "Let everyone here close his eyes, and become blind. He who opens his eyes will be adjudged a traitor. It is given to only one man to see those who are gathered in this room. Any prying eyes will receive the kiss of a hot iron, that what they have seen may be sealed into the brain."

Leung Fah, seated on the floor, her feet doubled back under her, her eyes closed tightly, sensed that men were moving around the room, examining the faces of those who were present by the aid of a flashlight, which stabbed its beam into each of the faces. And she could feel heat upon her cheeks, which made her realize that a man with a white-hot iron stood ready to plunge the iron into any eyes which might show signs of curiosity.

"She is strange to me," a voice said, a voice which spoke with the hissing sound of the *yut boen gwiee*—the ghosts of the sunrise.

"She is mine," the voice of Sahm Seuh said, and the light ceased to illuminate her closed eyelids. The hot iron passed by.

She heard a sudden scream, the sizzling of a hot iron, a yell of mortal anguish, and the sound of a body as it thudded to the floor. She did not open her eyes. Life, in China, is cheap.

At length the silent roll call had been completed. The voice of Sahm Seuh said, "Eyes may now open."

Leung Fah opened her eyes. The room was black with darkness.

"Shortly before the dawn," Sahm Seuh said, "there will be the roar of many motors in the sky. Each of you will be given a red flare and matches. To each of you will be whispered the name of the place where the red flare is to be placed. When you hear the roar of motors, you will crouch over the flare, as though kneeling on the ground in terror. When the motors reach the eastern end of the city, you will hold a match in your fingers. There will be none to watch, because people will be intent upon their own safety. When the planes are overhead, you will set fire to the red flares, and then you will run very rapidly. You will return most quickly to this place; you will receive plenty gold."

"It is, however, imperative that you come to this place quickly. The bombing will last until just before daylight. You must be here before the bombing is finished. You will receive your gold. In the confusion you will flee to the river. A boat will be waiting. It will be necessary

that you hide for some time, because an investigation will be made. There are spies who spy upon us, and one cannot explain the possession of gold. You will be hidden until there is more work."

Once more there was a period of silence, broken only by the shuffling of men and of whispered orders. Leung Fah felt a round, wooden object thrust into her hands. A moment later, a box of matches was pushed into her fingers. A man bent over her.

"The house of the Commissioner of Public Safety," he said.

The shuffling ceased. The voice of Sahm Seuh said, "That is all. Go, and wait at the appointed places. Hurry back and there will be much gold. In order to avoid suspicion, you will leave here at intervals of five minutes."

Leung Fah stood in the darkness, packed with people whom she did not know, reeking in the stench of stale perspiration. At intervals she heard a whispered command. After each whisper the door would open and one of the persons in that narrow, crowded staircase would slip from the suffocating atmosphere into the relative coolness of the street.

At length the door was in front of her. Hands pushed against her. The door swung open and she found herself once more in The Alley of the Sky Horse, shuffling along with demure eyes downcast, and a face of a sleepwalker.

Leung Fah went only so far as the house where the sacrifices were being offered to the spirit of the departed. The ashes of the sacrificial fire were still smouldering in the narrow street, drifted about by vagrant gusts of wind. Leung Fah knew that in this house there would be mourners, that any who were of the faith and desired to join in sending thought waves to the Ancestor in the Beyond would be welcome.

She climbed the stairs, and heard chanting. Around the table were grouped seven nuns with heads as bald as a sharp razor could make them. At another table, flickering peanut-oil lamps illuminated a painting of the ancestor who had in turn joined his ancestors. The table was loaded with sacrifices. There were some twenty people in the room chanting prayers.

Leung Fah unostentatiously joined this group. Shortly thereafter she moved quietly to the stairs which gave to the roof, and within 30 minutes had worked her way back to the roof of the house of the three candles. She sought a deep shadow, merged herself within it and became motionless.

Slowly the hours of the night wore away. Leung Fah began to listen. Her ears, strained toward the East, then heard a peculiar sound. It was like distant thunder over the mountains.

With ominous rapidity the murmur of sound in the East grew into

a roar. She could hear the screams of people in the streets below, could hear babies, aroused from their sleep as they were snatched up crying by frantic parents.

Still Leung Fah remained motionless. The planes swept by overhead. Here and there in the city bright red flares suddenly blossomed into blood-red pools of crimson. And wherever there was a flare, an enemy plane swooped down, and a moment later a mushroom of flame rose up against the night sky, followed by a reverberating report which shook the city.

Leung Fah crept to the edge of the roof where she might peer over and watch The Sky Horse Alley. She saw surreptitious figures darting from shadow to shadow, slipping through the portals of the house of three candles.

At length a shadow, more bulky than the rest, the shadow of a fat man running on noiseless feet, crossed the street, and was swallowed up within the entrance of the house of three candles. The planes still roared overhead.

Leung Fah placed her box of red fire on the roof, and tore off the paper. With calm, untrembling hands, she struck a match to flame, the flame to the flare.

In the crimson pool of light which illuminated all the house-tops, Leung Fah fled from one rooftop to another. And yet it seemed she had only been running a few seconds when a giant plane mate-

rialized overhead and came roaring down out of the sky. She heard the scream of a torpedo. The entire street rocked under the impact of the terrific explosion.

Leung Fah was flung to her knees. Her eardrums seemed shattered, her eyes about to burst from their sockets under the terrific rush of pressure which swept along with the blast.

Day was dawning when she recovered enough to limp down to The Sky Horse Alley. The roar of the planes was receding.

Leung Fah hobbled slowly and painfully to the place where the house of the three candles had stood. There was now a deep hole in The Sky Horse Alley, a hole surrounded by bits of wreckage and torn bodies.

A blackened torso lay almost at her feet. She examined it intently; all that was left of Sahm Seuh.

She turned and limped back up The Sky Horse Alley, her eyes downcast and expressionless, her face as though it had been carved of wood.

The sun rose in the East, and the inhabitants of Canton, long since accustomed to having the grim presence of death at their side, prepared to clear away the bodies and debris, resume once more their daily course of ceaseless activity.

Leung Fah lifted the bamboo yoke to her sore shoulders. *Aiii ah-h-h* it was painful, but one must work if one would eat.

# Frances and Richard Lockridge

## Pattern for Murder

*The first Mr. and Mrs. North detective short story . . . about Fern Hartley who would have made a perfect witness in a murder case—she had "total recall" of the past. The only trouble was, it was she who was murdered . . .*

FERN HARTLEY CAME TO NEW York to die, although that was far from her intention. She came from Centertown, in the Middle West, and died during a dinner party—given in her honor, at a reunion of schoolmates. She died at the bottom of a steep flight of stairs in a house on West Twelfth Street. She was a little woman and she wore a fluffy white dress. She stared at unexpected death through strangely bright blue eyes. . . .

There had been nothing to foreshadow so tragic an ending to the party—nothing, at any rate, on which Pamela North, who was one of the schoolmates, could precisely put a finger. It was true that Pam, as the party progressed, had increasingly felt tenseness in herself; it was also true that, toward the end, Fern Hartley had seemed to behave somewhat oddly. But the tenseness, Pam told herself, was entirely her own fault, and as for Fern's behavior—well, Fern was a little odd. Nice, of course, but—trying. Pam had been tried.

She had sat for what seemed like

hours with a responsive smile stiffening her lips and with no comparable response stirring in her mind. It was from that, surely, that the tenseness—the uneasiness—arose. Not from anything on which a finger could be put. It's my own fault, Pam North thought. This is a reunion, and I don't reunite. Not with Fern, anyway.

It had been Fern on whom Pam had responsively smiled. Memories of old days, of schooldays, had fluttered from Fern's mind like pressed flowers from the yellowed pages of a treasured book. They had showered about Pam North, who had been Fern's classmate at Southwest High School in Centertown. They had showered also about Hortense Notson and about Phyllis Pitt. Classmates, too, they had been those years ago—they and, for example, a girl with red hair.

"—red hair," Fern Hartley had said, leaning forward, eyes bright with memory. "Across the aisle from you in Miss Burton's English class. Of course, you remember,

Pam. She went with the boy who stuttered."

I am Pamela North, who used to be Pamela Britton, Pam told herself, behind a fixed smile. I'm not an impostor; I did go to Southwest High. If only I could prove it by remembering something—anything. Any *little* thing.

"The teacher with green hair?" Pam North said, by way of experiment. "Streaks of, anyway? Because the dye—"

Consternation clouded Fern's bright eyes. "Pam!" she said. "That was another one entirely. Miss Burton was the one who—"

It had been like that from the start of the party—the party of three couples and Miss Fern Hartley, still of Centertown. They were gathered in the long living room of the Stanley Pitts' house—the gracious room which ran the depth of the small, perfect house—an old New York house, retaining the charm (if also something of the inconvenience) of the previous century.

As the party started that warm September evening, the charm was uppermost. From open casement windows at the end of the room there was a gentle breeze. In it, from the start, Fern's memories had fluttered.

And none of the memories had been Pam North's memories. Fern has total recall; I have total amnesia, Pam thought, while keeping the receptive smile in place, since

one cannot let an old schoolmate down. Did the others try as hard? Pam wondered. Find themselves as inadequate to recapture the dear, dead days?

Both Hortense Notson and Phyllis Pitt had given every evidence of trying, Pam thought, letting her mind wander. Fern was now re-living a perfectly wonderful picnic, of their junior year. Pam was not.

Pam did not let the smile waver; from time to time she nodded her bright head and made appreciative sounds. Nobody had let Fern down; all had taken turns in listening—even the men. Jerry North was slacking now, but he had been valiant. His valor had been special, since he had never even been in Centertown. And Stanley Pitt had done his bit, too; of course, he was the host. Of course, Fern was the Pitts' house guest; what a lovely house to be a guest in, Pam thought, permitting her eyes to follow her mind's wandering.

Stanley—what a distinguished-looking man he is, Pam thought—was with Jerry, near the portable bar. She watched Jerry raise his glass as he listened. Her own glass was empty, and nobody was doing anything about it. An empty glass to go with an empty mind, Pam thought, and watched Fern sip ginger ale. Fern never drank anything stronger. Not that she had anything against drinking. Of course not. But even one drink made her feel all funny.

"Well," Pam had said, when Fern had brought the subject up, earlier on. "Well, that's more or less the idea, I suppose. This side of hilarious, of course."

"You know," Fern said then, "you always did talk funny. Remember when we graduated and you—"

Pam didn't remember. Without looking away from Fern, or letting the smile diminish, Pam nevertheless continued to look around the room. How lovely Phyllis is, Pam thought—really is. Blonde Phyllis Pitt was talking to Clark Notson, blond also, and sturdy, and looking younger than he almost certainly was.

Clark had married Hortense in Centertown. He was older—Pam remembered that he had been in college when they were in high school. He had married her when she was a skinny, dark girl, who had had to be prouder than anyone else because her parents lived over a store and not, properly, in a house. And look at her now, Pam thought, doing so. Dark still—and slim and quickly confident, and most beautifully arrayed.

Well, Pam thought, we've all come a long way. (She nodded, very brightly, to another name from the past—a name signifying nothing.) Stanley Pitt and Jerry—neglecting his own wife, Jerry North was—had found something of fabulous interest to discuss, judging by their behavior. Stanley

was making points, while Jerry listened and nodded. Stanley was making points one at a time, with the aid of the thumb and the fingers of his right hand. He touched thumb-tip to successive fingertips, as if to crimp each point in place. And Jerry—how selfish could a man get—ran a hand through his hair, as he did when he was interested.

"Oh," Pam said. "Of course I remember *him*, Fern."

A little lying is a gracious thing. What a witness Fern would make, Pam thought. Everything that had happened—beginning, apparently, at the age of two—was brightly clear in her mind, not muddy as in the minds of so many. The kind of witness Bill Weigand, member in good standing of the New York City Police Department, always hoped to find and almost never did—never had, that she could remember, in all the many investigations she and Jerry had shared since they first met Bill years ago.

Fern would be a witness who really remembered. If Fern, Pam thought, knew something about a murder, or where a body was buried, or any of the other important things which so often come up, she would remember it precisely and remember it whole. A good deal of sifting would have to be done, but Bill was good at that.

Idly, her mind still wandering, Pam hoped that Fern did not, in

fact, know anything of buried bodies. It could, obviously be dangerous to have so total a recall and to put no curb on it. She remembered, and this from association with Bill, how often somebody did make that one revealing remark too many. Pam sternly put a curb on her own mind and imagination. What could Fern—pleasant, bubbling Fern, who had not adventured out of Centertown, excepting for occasional trips like these—know of dangerous things?

Pam North, whose lips ached, in whose mind Fern's words rattled, looked hard at Jerry, down the room, at the bar. Get me out of this, Pam willed across the space between them. Get me out of this! It had been known to work or had sometimes seemed to work. It did not now. Jerry concentrated on what Stanley Pitt was saying. Jerry ran a hand through his hair.

"Oh, dear," Pam said, breaking into the flow of Fern's words, as gently as she could. "Jerry wants me for something. You know how husbands are."

She stopped abruptly, remembering that Fern didn't, never having had one. She got up—and was saved by Phyllis, who moved in. What a hostess, Pam thought, and moved toward Jerry and the bar. The idea of saying that to poor Fern, Pam thought. This is certainly one of my hopeless evenings. She went toward Jerry.

"I don't," she said when she

reached him, "remember anything about anything. Except one teacher with green hair, and that was the wrong woman."

Jerry said it seemed very likely.

"There's something a little ghoulish about all this digging up of the past," Pam said. "Suppose some of it's still alive?" she added.

"Huh?" Jerry said.

He was told not to bother. And that Pam could do with a drink. Jerry poured, for them both, from a pitcher in which ice tinkled.

"Some time," Pam said, "she's going to remember that one thing too many. That's what I mean. You see?"

"No," Jerry said, simply.

"Not everybody," Pam said, a little darkly, "wants everything remembered about everything. Because—"

Stanley Pitt, who had turned away, turned quickly back. He informed Pam that she had something there.

"I heard her telling Hortense—" Stanley Pitt said, and stopped abruptly, since Hortense, slim and graceful (and so beautifully arrayed) was coming toward them.

"How Fern doesn't change," Hortense said. "Pam, do you remember the boy next door?"

"I don't seem to remember anything," Pam said. "Not anything at all."

"You don't remember," Hortense said. "I don't remember, Phyllis doesn't. And with it all, she's so—

sweet." She paused. "Or is she?" she said. "Some of the things she brings up—always doing ohs, the boy next door was. How does one do an oh?"

"Oh," Jerry said, politely demonstrating, and then, "Was he the one with green hair?" The others looked blank at that, and Pam said it was just one of the things she'd got mixed up, and now Jerry was mixing it worse. And, Pam said, did Hortense ever feel she hadn't really gone to Southwest High School at all and was merely pretending she had? Was an impostor?

"Far as I can tell," Hortense said, "I never lived in Centertown. Just in a small, one-room vacuum. Woman without a past." She paused. "Except," she said, in another tone, "Fern remembers me in great detail."

Stanley Pitt had been looking, over their heads—looking at his wife, now the one listening to Fern. In a moment of silence, Fern's voice fluted. "Really, a dreadful thing to happen," Fern said. There was no context.

"Perhaps," Stanley said, turning back to them, "it's better to have no past than to live in one. Better all around. And safer."

He seemed about to continue, but then Clark Notson joined them. Clark did not, Pam thought, look like a man who was having a particularly good time. "Supposed to get Miss Hartley her ginger ale,"

he said. He spoke rather hurriedly.

Jerry, who was nearest the bar, said, "Here" and reached for the innocent bottle—a bottle Pam thought, which looked a little smug and virtuous among the other bottles. Jerry used a silver opener snapped off the bottle cap. The cap bounced off, tinkled against a bottle.

"Don't know your own strength," Clark said, and took the bottle and, with it, a glass into which Jerry dropped ice. "Never drinks anything stronger, the lady doesn't," Clark said, and bore away the bottle.

"And doesn't need to," Hortense Notson said, and drifted away. She could drift immaculately.

"She buys dresses," Pam said. "Wouldn't you know?"

"As distinct—?" Jerry said, and was told he knew perfectly well what Pam meant.

"Buys them for, not from," Pam said.

To this, Jerry simply said, "Oh."

It was then a little after eight, and there was a restless circulation in the long room. Pam was with Phyllis Pitt. Phyllis assured her that food would arrive soon. And hadn't old times come flooding back?

"Mm," Pam said. Pam was then with Clark Notson and, with him, talked unexpectedly of tooth paste. One never knows what will come up at a party. It appeared that Clark's firm made tooth paste. Stanley Pitt joined them. He said

Clark had quite an operation there. Pam left them and drifted, dutifully, back to Fern, who sipped ginger ale. Fern's eys were very bright. They seemed almost to glitter.

(But that's absurd Pam thought. People's don't, only cats'.)

"It's so exciting," Fern said, and looked around the room, presumably at "it." "To meet you all again, and your nice husbands. and—" She paused. "Only," she said. "I keep wondering . . ."

Pam waited. She said, "What, Fern?"

"Oh," Fern said. "Nothing dear. Nothing really. Do you remember—"

Pam did not. She listened for a time, and was relieved by Hortense, and drifted on again. For a minute or two, then, Pam North was alone and stood looking up and down the softly lighted room. Beyond the windows at the far end, lights glowed up from the garden below. The room was filled, but not harshly, with conversation—there seemed, somehow to be more than the seven of them in it. Probably, Pam thought, memories crowded it—the red-haired girl, the stuttering boy.

Fern laughed. Her laughter was rather high in pitch. It had a little "hee" at the end. That little "hee," Pam thought idly, would identify Fern—be something to remember her by. As Jerry's habit of running his hand through his hair would

identify him if, about all else, she suddenly lost her memory. (As I've evidently begun to do, Pam North thought.) Little tricks. And Fern puts her right index finer gently to the tip of her nose, presumably when she's thinking. Why, Pam thought, she did that as a girl and was surprised to remember.

Her host stood in front of her, wondering what he could get her. She had, Pam told him, everything.

"Including your memories?" Stanley Pitt asked her. Pam noticed a small scar on his chin. But it wasn't, of course, the same thing as—as running a hand through your hair. But everybody has something, which is one way of telling them apart.

"I seem," Pam said, "a little short of memories."

"By comparison with Miss Hartley," Stanley said, "who isn't? A pipe line to the past. Can't I get you a drink?"

He could not. Pam had had enough. So, she thought, had all of them. Not that anybody was in the least tight. But still . . .

Over the other voices, that of Fern Hartley was raised. There was excitement in it. So it isn't alcohol, Pam thought, since Fern hadn't had any. It's just getting keyed up at a party. She looked toward Fern, who was talking, very rapidly, to Jerry. No doubt, Pam thought, about what I was like in high school. Not that there's anything he shouldn't know. Still . . .

Fern was now very animated. If, Pam thought, I asked whether anyone here was one cocktail up I'd—why, I'd say Fern. Fern, of all people. Or else, Pam thought, she has some exciting surprise.

It was now eight thirty. A maid appeared at the door, waited to be noticed, and nodded to Phyllis Pitt, who said, at once. "Dinner, everybody." The dining room was downstairs, on a level with the garden. "These old stairs," Phyllis said. "Everybody be careful."

The stairs were, indeed, very steep, and the treads very narrow. But there were handrails and a carpet. The stairway ended in the dining room, where candles glowed softly on the table, among flowers.

"If you'll sit—" Phyllis said, starting with Pam North. "And you and—" They moved to the places indicated. "And Fern—" Phyllis said, and stopped. "Why," she said, "where is—"

She did not finish, because Fern Hartley stood at the top of the steep staircase. She was a slight figure in a white dress. She seemed to be staring fixedly down at them, her eyes strangely bright. Her face was flushed and she made odd, uncertain movements with her little hands.

"I'm—" Fern said, and spoke harshly, loudly, and so that the word was almost a shapeless sound. "I'm—"

And then Fern Hartley, taking both hands from the rails, pitched

headfirst down the staircase. In a great moment of silence, her body made a strange, soft thudding on the stairs. She did not cry out.

At the bottom of the red-carpeted stairs she lay quite still. Her head was at a hideous angle to her body—an impossible angle to her body. That was how she died.

Fern Hartley died of a broken neck. There was no doubt. Six people had seen her fall. Now she lay at the bottom of the stairs and no one would ever forget her soft quick falling down that steep flight. An ambulance surgeon confirmed the cause of her death and another doctor from up the street—called when it seemed the ambulance would never get there.

But after he had knelt for some time by the body the second doctor beckoned the ambulance surgeon and they went out into the hallway. Then the ambulance surgeon beckoned one of the policemen who had arrived with the ambulance, and the policeman went into the hall with them. After a few minutes, the policeman returned and asked, politely enough, that they all wait upstairs. There were, he said meaninglessly, a few formalities.

They waited upstairs, in the living room. They waited for more than two hours, puzzled and in growing uneasiness. Then a thinish man of medium height, about whom there was nothing special in appearance, came into the room and looked around at them.

"Why, *Bill!*" Pam North said. The thinnish man looked at her, and then at Jerry North, and said, "Oh." Then he said there were one or two points.

And then Pam said, "Oh," on a note strangely flat.

How one introduces a police officer, who happens to be an old and close friend, to other friends who happen to be murder suspects—else why was Bill Weigand there?—had long been a moot question with Pam and Jerry North. Pam said, "This is Bill Weigand, everybody. Captain Weigand. He's—he's a policeman."

"All right, Pam," Bill Weigand said. Then, "You all saw her fall. Tell me about it." He looked around at them, back at Pam North. It was she who told him.

Her eyes had been "staring"? Her face flushed? Her movements uncertain? Her voice hoarse? "Yes," Pam said, confirming each statement. Bill Weigand looked from one to another of the six in the room. He received nods of confirmation. One of the men—tall, dark-haired but with gray coming, a little older than the others—seemed about to speak. Bill waited. The man shook his head. Bill got them identified then. The tall man was Stanley Pitt. This was his house.

"But," Bill said, "she hadn't been drinking. The medical examiner is quite certain of that." He seemed to wait for comment.

"She said she never did," Pam told him.

"So—" Bill said.

Then Hortense Notson spoke, in a tense voice. "You act," she said, "as if you think one of us pushed her."

Weigand looked at her carefully. He said, "No. That didn't happen, Mrs. Notson. How could it have happened. You were all in the dining room, looking up at her. How could any of you have pushed her?"

"Then," Clark Notson said, and spoke quickly, with unexpected violence. "Then why all this? She . . . what? Had a heart attack?"

"Possibly," Bill said. "But the doctors—"

Again he was interrupted.

"I've heard of you," Notson said, and leaned forward in his chair. "Aren't you homicide?"

"Right," Bill said. He looked around again, slowly. "As Mr. Notson said, I'm homicide." And he waited.

Phyllis Pitt—the pretty, the very pretty, light-haired woman—had been crying. More than the rest, in expression, in movements, she showed the shock of what had happened. "Those dreadful stairs," she said, as if to herself. "Those dreadful stairs."

Her husband got up and went to her and leaned over her. He touched her bright hair and said, very softly, "All right, Phyl. All right."

"Bill," Pam said. "Fern fell downstairs and—and died. What more is there?"

"You all agree," Bill said, "that she was flushed and excited and uncertain—as if she had been drinking. But she hadn't been drinking. And . . . the pupils of her eyes were dilated. That was why she seemed to be staring. Because, you see, she couldn't see where she was going. So . . ." He paused. "She walked off into the air. I have to find out why. So what I want . . ."

It took him a long time to get what he wanted, which was all they could remember, one memory reinforcing another, of what had happened from the start of the dinner party until it ended with Fern Hartley, at the foot of the staircase, all her memories dead. Pam, listening, contributing what she could, could not see that a pattern formed—a pattern of murder.

Fern had seemed entirely normal—at least, until near the end. They agreed on that. She had always remembered much about the past and talked of it. Meeting old school friends, after long separation, she had seemed to remember everything—far more than any of the others.

"Most of it, to be honest, wasn't very interesting." That was Hortense Notson. Hortense looked at Pam, at Phyllis Pitt.

"She was so sweet," Phyllis said, in a broken voice.

"So—so interested herself." Pam said, "A good deal of it was pretty long ago, Bill."

Fern had shared her memories chiefly with the other women. But she had talked of the past, also, with the men.

"It didn't mean much to me," Stanely Pitt said. "It seemed to be all about Centertown, and I've never been in Centertown. Phyllis and I met in New York." He paused. "What's the point of this?" he said.

"I don't know," Bill Weigand told him. "Not yet. Everything she remembered seemed to be trivial? Nothing stands out? To any of you?"

"She remembered I had a black eye the first time she saw me," Clark Notson said. "Hortense and I—when we were going together—ran into her at a party. It was a long time ago. And I had a black eye, she said. I don't remember anything about it. I don't even remember the party, actually. Yes, I'd call it pretty trivial."

"My God," Stanley Pitt said. "Is there some point to this."

"I don't know," Bill said again, and was patient. "Had you known Miss Hartley before, Mr. Pitt?"

"Met her for the first time yesterday," Stanley told him. "We had her to dinner and she stayed the night. Today I took her to lunch, because Phyl had things to do about the party. And—" He stopped. He shrugged and shook

his head, seemingly at the futility of everything.

"I suppose," Jerry North said. "the point is—did she remember something that somebody—one of us—wanted forgotten?"

"Yes" Bill said. "It may be that."

Then it was in the open. And, with it in the open, the six looked at one another; and there was a kind of wariness in the manner of their looking. Although what on earth I've got to be wary about I don't know, Pam thought. Or Jerry, she added in her mind. She couldn't have told Jerry anything about me. Well, not anything important. At least not very . . .

"I don't understand," Phyllis said, and spoke dully. "I just don't understand at all. Fern just—just fell down those awful stairs."

It became like a game of tennis, with too many players, played in the dark. "Try to remember," Bill had told them; and it seemed they tried. But all they remembered was apparently trivial.

"There was something about a boy next door," Phyllis Pitt remembered. "A good deal older than she was—than we all were. Next door to Fern. A boy named—" She moved her hands helplessly. "I've forgotten. A name I'd never heard before. Something—she said something dreadful—happened to him. I suppose he died of something."

"No," Hortense Notson said. "She told me about him. He didn't die. He went to jail. He was always

saying 'oh.'" She considered. "I think," she said. "he was named Russell something." She paused again. "Never in my life, did I hear so much about people I'd never heard of. Gossip about the past."

Stanley Pitt stood up. His impatience was evident.

"Look," he said. "This is my house, Captain. These people are my guests. Is any of this badgering getting you anywhere? And . . . where is there to get? Maybe she had a heart attack. Maybe she ate something that—" He stopped, rather abruptly; rather as if he had stumbled over something.

Weigand waited, but Pitt did not continue. Then Bill said they had thought of that. The symptoms—they had all noticed the symptoms—including the dilation of the pupils, might have been due to acute food poisoning. But she had eaten almost nothing during the cocktail period. The maid who had passed canapés was sure of that. Certainly she had eaten nothing the rest had not. And she had drunk only ginger ale, from a freshly opened bottle.

"Which," Bill said, "apparently you opened, Jerry."

Jerry North ran his right hand through his hair. He looked at Bill blankly.

"Of course you did," Pam said. "So vigorously the bottle cap flew off. Don't you—"

"Oh," Jerry said. Everybody looked at him. "Is that supposed—"

But he was interrupted by Pitt, still leaning forward in his chair. "Wait," Pitt said, and put right thumb and index finger together, firmly, as if to hold a thought pinched between them. They waited.

"This place I took her to lunch," Stanley said. "It's a little place—little downstairs place, but wonderful food. I've eaten there off and on for years. But . . . I don't suppose it's too damned sanitary. Not like your labs are, Clark. And the weather's been hot. And—" He seemed to remember something else and held this new memory between thumb and finger. "Miss Hartley ate most of a bowl of ripe olives. Said she never seemed to get enough of them. And . . . isn't there something that can get into ripe olives? That can poison people?" He put the heel of one hand to his forehead. "God," he said. "Do you suppose it was that?"

"You mean food poisoning?" Weigand said. "Yes—years ago people got it from ripe olives. But not recently, that I've heard of. New methods and—"

"The olives are imported," Pitt said. "From Italy, I think. Yes. Dilated pupils—"

"Right," Bill said. "And the other symptoms match quite well. You may—"

But now he was interrupted by a uniformed policeman, who brought him a slip of paper. Bill Weigand looked at it and put it

in his pocket and said, "Right," and the policeman went out again.

"Mr. Notson," Bill said, "you're production manager of the Winslow Pharmaceutical Company, aren't you?"

Notson looked blank. He said, "Sure."

"Which makes all kinds of drug products?"

Notson continued to look blank. He nodded his head.

"And Mr. Pitt," Bill Weigand said. "You're—"

He's gone off on a tangent, Pam North thought, half listening. What difference can it make that Mr. Notson makes drugs—or that Mr. Pitt tells people how to run offices and plants better—is an "efficiency engineer"? Because just a few minutes ago, somebody said something really important. Because it was wrong. Because—Oh! Pam thought. It's on the tip of my mind. If people would only be quiet, so I could think. If Bill only wouldn't go off on these—

"All kinds of drugs," Bill was saying, from his tangent, in the distance. "Including preparations containing atropine?"

She heard Clark Notson say, "Yes. Sure."

"Because," Bill said, and now Pam heard him clearly—very clearly—"Miss Hartley had been given atropine. It might have been enough to have killed her, if she had not had quick and proper treatment. She'd had enough to

bring on dizziness and double vision. So that, on the verge of losing consciousness, she fell downstairs and broke her neck. Well?"

He looked around.

"The ginger ale," Jerry said. "The ginger ale I opened. That . . . opened so easily. Was that it?"

"Probably," Bill said. "The cap taken off carefully. Put back on carefully. After enough atropine sulphate had been put in. Enough to stop her remembering." Again he looked around at them; and Pam looked, too, and could see nothing—except shock—in any face. There seemed to be fear in none.

"The doctors suspected atropine from the start," Bill said, speaking slowly. "But the symptoms of atropine poisoning are very similar to those of food poisoning—or ptomaine. If she had lived to be treated, almost any physician would have diagnosed food poisoning—particularly after Mr. Pitt remembered the olives—and treated for that. Not for atropine. Since the treatments are different, she probably would not have lived." He paused. "Well," he said, "What did she remember? So that there was death for remembrance?"

Phyllis Pitt covered her eyes with both hands and shook her head slowly, dully. Hortense Notson looked at Weigand with narrowed eyes and her husband with—Pam thought—something like defiance. Stanley Pitt looked at the floor and

seemed deep in thought, to be planning each thought between thumb and finger, when Weigand turned from them and said, "Yes?" to a man in civilian clothes. He went to talk briefly with the man. He returned. He said the telephone was a useful thing; he said the Centertown police were efficient.

"The boy next door," Weigand said, "was named Russell Clarkson. He was some years—fifteen, about—older than Fern Hartley. Not a boy any more, when she was in high school, but still 'the boy next door.' He did go to jail, as you said, Mrs. Notson. He helped set up a robbery of the place he worked in. A payroll messenger was killed. Clarkson got twenty years to life. And—he escaped in two years, and was never caught. And—he was a chemist. Mr. Notson. As you are. Mr. Clark Notson."

Notson was on his feet. His face was very red and he no longer looked younger than he was. He said, "You're crazy! I can prove—" His voice rose until he was shouting across the few feet between himself and Weigand.

And then it came to Pam—came with a kind of violent clarity. "Wait, Bill. Wait!" Pam shouted. "It wasn't 'ohs' at all. Not *saying* them. That's what was wrong."

They were listening. Bill was listening.

Then Pam pointed at Hortense. "You," she said, "the first time

you said *doing* ohs. Not saying 'Oh.' You even asked how one *did* an oh. We thought it was the—the o-h kind of O. But—it was the *letter* O. And—*look at him now!* He's doing them now. *With his fingers.*"

And now she pointed at Stanley Pitt, who was forming the letter O with the thumb and index finger of his right hand; who now, violently, closed into fists his betraying hands. A shudder ran through his body. But he spoke quietly, without looking up from the floor.

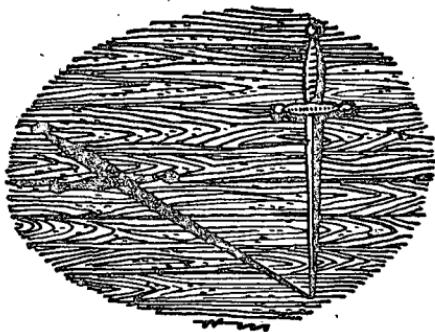
"She hadn't quite remembered," he said, as if talking of something which had happened a long time ago. "Not quite." And he put the thumb and index finger tip to tip again, to measure the smallness of a margin. "But—she would have. She remembered everything. I've

changed a lot and she was a little girl, but . . ."

He looked at his hands. "I've always done that, I guess," he said. He spread his fingers and looked at his hands. "Once it came up," he said, "there would be fingerprints. So—I had to try." He looked up, then, at his wife. "You see, Phyl, that I had to try?"

Phyllis covered her face with her hands.

After a moment Stanley Pitt looked again at his hands, spreading them in front of him. Slowly he began to bring together the fingertips and thumbtips of both hands; and he studied the movements of his fingers intently, as if they were new to him. He sat so, his hands moving in patterns they had never been able to forget, until Weigand told him it was time to go.



# John Dickson Carr

## The Empty Flat

*A relatively "unknown" story about Colonel March of the Department of Queer Complaints . . . a novel-in-miniature, with Carresque romance and Dicksonian atmosphere, eerie and tinged with terror—in a phrase, JDC-CD's hallmarks: the impossible crime with the completely possible solution.*

**T**HREE IT WAS, THE CONFOUNDED radio going again.

Chase put down his pen. For some minutes he had had a vague idea that there was a disturbance going on somewhere, and suddenly it broke into his thoughts with intolerable loudness from the flat below. A Study of the Royal Exchequer and its Custodians from 1660 to 1688 may not be a popular subject on which to be writing a thesis, but it requires concentration. Douglas Chase, PhD., F.R. Hist.S., poked his head out of a maze of books like a dazed turtle.

The simile is not altogether deserved. Douglas Chase was neither turtle nor worm, but an eminently serious-minded young man who had a job of work to do. This thesis—if he won the prize—meant a great deal to him. It meant a full professorship at an American university, and a salary amounting to nearly two thousand pounds a year. To an English scholar such a salary seemed incredible, and Chase wondered hazily what he would do with

it if he got it; but there it was.

"I think your chances are very good," a colleague had told him that afternoon. "All the same, I wish we knew a bit more about K. G. Mills."

For the only serious competition seemed to come from a man named K. G. Mills. Chase had never met K. G. Mills, about whom, in fact, there was some element of mystery. But his attainments looked formidable; and among Chase's friends the very name of Mills had become a huge and legendary symbol of villainy. Now that concentration was most necessary to beat Mills, the tenant of the flat below had decided to let his radio run mad.

First of all Chase cursed the construction of modern flats. His own was a modest two-room affair on the first floor of a new block near Primrose Hill; a hive of raw red brick and white paint. Tenants had filled it like flies, for the rents were modest and Chase found modern conveniences very suitable to one who chronically forgot to light fires

or put shillings in an electric meter. But the thinness of the walls was remarkable. Through those walls you could hear clocks strike and the pointed comments of your neighbour's wife when her husband came home late. And now it was radios, at an hour approaching midnight.

A fair-minded man, Chase tried to shut his ears against the noise. But the tenant of the ground-floor flat seemed to have a partiality for the shrillest dance bands that home or continental stations could provide, switched on at full volume. When at length he had read the same page three times without understanding a word, he decided that he would have to act.

He got up, ran his hands through his hair with a vague idea of tidying himself, and started for the door. He was out in the corridor when the chilliness of the air reminded him that he had forgotten his coat. So he pulled on a sweater, and padded downstairs in his slippers.

Except for that radio, the whole building seemed unusually quiet. As a rule it was a shell of echoes, throwing back each gritty-sounding footstep or hum of the lift. He met nobody. Going down concrete stairs, where a faint mist had got into the bleakly lighted corridors, he turned into the passage which led to flat 10, directly below his own. And the passage was in darkness.

Trouble with the lights again, he supposed. He struck a match and groped his way down the passage. Flats 10 and 11, set side by side, occupied the end of the wing; and the music on the radio had now become a loud, confused murmur. Wondering who occupied number 10, he held the flame of the match up to the visiting-card stuck in its slot on the green-painted door. Then Douglas Chase struck another match in a hurry, and stared.

The card read: *K. G. Mills.*

Chase studied it incredulously. The thing was a coincidence, no doubt. It was impossible that this should be the formidable K. G. Mills of legend. But it gave him a start to meet the name both on duty and off, and he almost turned away from the door. But the radio decided him. He rang the bell.

"Yes, yes, yes!" called a female voice—and he was conscious of a sudden suspicion. "Just a moment, please!"

The door was dragged open. In the little green-painted entrance hall he faced a woman who could not be more than twenty-three or twenty-four, a woman with a flurried manner and ink-stained fingers. The fact that her hair was drawn back into a bun did not lessen the attractiveness of a white complexion, a full-lipped but prim-looking mouth, and a pair of extraordinarily merry blue eyes. But they were not merry now. Irresolutely she drew the back of her

hand across her forehead, leaving ink-smudges there.

"Yes, yes, yes?" she inquired.

"Oh, Lord," muttered Chase. He added, on a last hope, "May I speak to Mr. Mills?"

The girl's manner changed.

"I am Mr. Mills," she said with cold dignity. "That is, I mean," she frowned and drew herself up, "to speak with academic accuracy, my name is Kathleen Gerrard Mills and I am the only Mills present at the moment. Oh, you know what I mean; but I have some terribly important research work to do, and I have been driven to such annoyance by an insufferable radio in the flat above me, that I am hardly able to say what I do mean."

Chase could hardly believe his ears.

"Madam," he said, "I am the tenant of the flat above. And I do not own a radio. In fact, I came down here to protest about yours."

Kathleen Mills's eyes, rather bemused with study, now woke up.

"But I don't own one either," she said.

She was wearing, he noticed, a grey skirt and a tight-fitting grey jumper which outlined a small, sturdy figure. She folded her arms gravely, frowned, and assumed the argumentative posture known to all dons. In one so young and attractive it might have provoked amusement if she had not been so desperately in earnest.

"This is extraordinary," she de-

clared. "That detestable cacophony is obviously coming from somewhere. Assuming the truth of your statement, Mr.—er—

"Chase," he said half-guiltily. "Dr. Chase. That is, University College, you know."

"Oh, my hat!" said the girl, shocked into naturalness.

They stood and stared at each other. Then Kathleen Mills, her colour higher, spoke with great dignity.

"How do you do?" she said formally. "While I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Dr. Chase, I am afraid that in fairness I must take this opportunity of saying to you that I believe your views on Episcopacy in Scotland to be the merest rubbish. Indeed, as I pointed out in the *Quarterly Survey*, you hardly even appear to have heard of Nottingham's Comprehension Bill." She added, half annoyed, "And where is your beard? I thought you would have a beard."

"I must disagree with you," said Chase. "I do not refer to the beard, but to the earlier part of your remarks. And if you would do me the honour of joining me in a coffee—or beer," he added doubtfully, "You drink beer?"

"Of course I drink beer," said the girl. "And I should love to. But I was thinking about this intolerable noise. As I say, it must come from somewhere."

It did. They heard it all about

them, more muffled but very insistent. In the quiet of the big building at past midnight it had an effect that verged on the eerie. And behind Kathleen Mills's manner Chase sensed some other emotion, something far from being at ease. His eyes wandered to the dark door of number 11 beside them.

"What about the flat next door?"

"I had thought of that," she admitted, rather too quickly. "My first idea was that it came from there. But that—well, it's an empty flat: the only empty flat in the building. And it seems unlikely that anybody would be operating a radio in an empty flat."

A stir of uncertainty touched Chase: the vision of a radio playing in a dark and empty flat was what he would have called an irrational one. The girl went on speaking.

"Superstition attaching to mere dead walls and plaster is foolish. We're rational beings, Dr. Chase; at least, I hope we are. Suppose a deed of violence is done in a certain house. Well! The house is torn down to make room for another—say a block of flats. Even suppose you do believe in emanations or influences, as I do not. Is there any reason why those influences should be present in a certain one flat on the ground floor, and not in any of the flats above? It is absurd."

"Look here," Chase asked quietly. "What are you talking about?"

"Well—that flat next door. It appears that dozens of people have

looked at it, and all of them have refused to take it. I'm sure I can't imagine why. There is nothing wrong with it. It's just the same as twenty others: Mr. Hemphill, the letting-agent, swears it is. But an absurd rumour has gone round that something horrible moves into it at night, and doesn't leave until morning. I told my trustee. That's Arnot Wilson, the barrister, you know; he's looked after things for me since my father died; and he was very much interested. He ridiculously tried to make jokes and frighten me about it. But after all, you know, I do sleep on the other side of the wall."

Though she smiled, the whites of her eyes had acquired an odd kind of luminousness, and she spoke with a greater rapidity. Beside the door in the angle of the wall was the tiny door of the service-hatch—dumb-waiter—to flat 11. Chase pulled it open. The inner door of the box-like hatch was also open. And now there could be no doubt.

"Yes, the radio is in there," he said. "Hear it?"

"And—and what is to be done about it?"

"Why, I'll crawl through the service-hatch and shut it off," Chase said simply.

Being long and lean, he could just manage to worm through. It was not a dignified business, stuck there with legs in the air, but he did not concern himself with that. Before he dived through the serv-

ice-hatch he had accidentally touched Kathleen Mills's hand; and the hand was cold.

The entrance hall of flat 11 was dark. It smelt of mist and raw paint, and it even felt unused. He was coming closer to the core of noise, the enigmatic wireless mumbling in the dark. It appeared to be in the living-room ahead. This was an ordinary flat like his own, though he wondered what had happened to the ground where he stood. The gritty floor creaked more than it should; and the farther he moved away from the door the more he felt like a man paying out a guide-line in a cave, uncertain of his footing.

A grey window moved out at him, then a glass-panelled door. He opened the door of the living-room, meeting the noise full-blast.

An edge of a street-lamp touched two misted windows. Down in the corner by the fireplace he saw a dim shape and a tiny glowing light. For such a volume of noise it was quite a small radio, one of those convenient affairs which can be carried about by hand. It was connected to a base-plug in the wall. He switched it off; and silence descended like an extinguisher-cap.

Afterwards there was nothing. No person, no movement, no sound beyond the creak of the floor when his heel pressed it—until a fierce ringing at the outer doorbell made him jump. Until then Douglas Chase did not realize how much

the hide was off his nerves, or how deep into the nerves a sudden noise could strike. He hurried to the door, turned a knob of the spring-lock, and met Kathleen.

"You seemed to be gone a long time," she told them. "Well?"

"I've turned it off," he said. "There is a radio in there, and nobody to play it or listen to it. There doesn't seem any rhyme or reason why it should be there. But there's nobody here now."

He was wrong.

It was perhaps just as well that they did not know it then. In the dim light of seven o'clock next morning, workmen constructing a boundary wall round the building passed the windows of flat number 11 on the ground floor. Through the living-room windows they saw nothing to interest them. But through the bedroom windows they saw a man huddled back into a corner as though he were trying to push himself through the wall. In appearance he was a short, stout, well-fed man, wearing an overcoat and a bowler hat. But he was dead; and they did not care to get too close to the expression on his face. James R. Hemphill, letting-agent of the flats, identified him as Mr. Arnot Wilson, barrister, of 56 Harrow Avenue, N.W. 3, and the doctor in attendance said that he had died of cardiac and nervous shock caused by fright. . . .

Two days later, when the doctor's verdict was confirmed at a

post-mortem by the Home Office Analyst, certain persons gathered in a room at New Scotland Yard.

The death of Mr. Arnot Wilson had caused a minor stir. In strictly limited circles Arnot Wilson was famous: as a "character," a persuasive speaker, almost a public entertainer. His gentle wit had a scratch rather than a sting. He liked to collect walking-sticks and match-boxes once used by royalty. It could be said that he bounced through life. His round, guileless face; his spats and cravats; his brushed coat and glossy head; all this made a kind of india-rubber dandyism which carried him everywhere.

He lived alone, except for a cook and a man-servant, in a tall Victorian house in Harrow Avenue—not far from the block of flats where he was found dead. This house he kept too warm, with electric heaters blazing all day even in passages and in bathrooms and almost too clean, for he was relentless to servants. Which made it all the more curious that he should be found dead of fright in an empty flat.

His body was found on Saturday morning. On Monday, Kathleen Mills and Douglas Chase were summoned to Scotland Yard. In a firelit room overlooking the Embankment they were met by a large, bland man with a speckled face, an amiable eye, and a cropped moustache. He introduced himself as Colonel March.

Colonel March's courtesy was as huge as himself.

"This," he said, "must be the dozenth time you have been troubled. But, as you understand, I must do it because my department is new to the case. I hope it does not upset you too much, Miss Mills?"

Kathleen bridled, as she always did at any hint of feminine weakness.

"I am not upset at all," she told him. "Mr. Wilson was one of my trustees. He managed the money my father left, what little there was of it. But I scarcely knew him. And—"

"You didn't like him?"

"I don't know," she replied, with an obvious struggle for honesty. "I've never been sure. All I know is that from the time I first knew him he never let off being facetious at my expense."

Suddenly she coloured, sensing an atmosphere, and broke out with violence:

"Oh, I'm being a prig and a fool! And you know it, don't you? But that's true. It was nothing but jokes, jokes, jokes; jokes about me, careers for women, our little scholar who has no boy-friends, never a pause, never a let-down in jokes. He was so tireless in it that sometimes he hardly seemed human."

Colonel March nodded gravely. Chase had not hitherto heard her speak with such frankness.

"Anyhow," she went on with a slight gesture, "there are some

questions we—Dr. Chase and I—must get answered. Your people have questioned us for two days, and yet still we don't know anything. Chief Inspector—what's his name?—Chief Inspector Ames was too evasive. Will you answer four straight questions?"

"If I can," said Colonel March. "Thank you. Well, here they are. What time did Mr. Wilson die? Did he really die of fright? Why was that radio playing? And what on earth was he doing there anyway? I happen to know he was horribly frightened of the dark."

Colonel Marsh sat down behind a broad desk, lowering his seventeen stone with some difficulty. He looked at the desk, at the windows, at the fire, at Inspector Roberts, his second-in-command. Then he seemed to come to a decision.

"To your first two questions," he answered, clearing his throat, "I can reply. Mr. Wilson died round about eleven o'clock on Friday. And it seems that he did die of fright."

Chase could not understand the brief look of uncertainty, almost of terror, on Kathleen's face. But she spoke.

"So he was actually in the bedroom, dead, when Dr. Chase and I were in that flat?"

"He was."

"And is it—well, is it medically correct to speak of death from fright?"

"It is," said Colonel March with abrupt vehemence. "You've hit it, Miss Mills. That is why it has been given over to me, to what we call here the department of Queer Complaints. There never was a complaint queerer than this, for there are almost no precedents in law. Let's make a supposition. Let's suppose that this is murder."

It was a new and unpleasant word. Chase stirred, but Colonel March's eyes remained bland.

"I only say, let's suppose it. Suppose I find a way to frighten someone so that his heart and nervous-system are shattered as though by a blow from a gigantic hammer: that, in non-technical language, is what the medical report means. I do not kill an invalid or a man with a weak heart, mind you. I choose a victim whose heart and nerves are sound, like Mr. Wilson. I do not touch him. But I expose to him, as though on a photographic plate, a mere sight so terrifying that his system cracks, and he dies."

Colonel March paused.

"Well, theoretically," he went on, "I am guilty of murder. That is the law. But could you get a jury to convict? I doubt it. I should say it would be impossible even to get a manslaughter verdict. Find a way to kill someone by fright, and you can commit murder almost with impunity."

Chase did not like this, because of its effect on Kathleen.

"As an interesting theory," he in-

terposed, "it's all very well. But is there any suggestion of murder?"

"What's our alternative?" inquired Colonel March, spreading out his hands. "That the empty flat is haunted? That we are beset by ghouls and hobgoblins? That a man dare not sleep at night for literal fear of his reason or his life? I can't believe it, my friend. The only other possibility—". He stopped, breathing rather heavily. Then he went on in his normal tone. "Miss Mills, Dr. Chase, it's only fair that you should hear the evidence. Inspector, will you ask Mr. Hemphill to come in?"

They waited. James Hemphill, the letting-agent, was not slow at coming in. He was a young, affable, harassed man who seemed to regard the affair less as a death than as a further bedevilment among all the complaints. Carefully dressed, with white hands and a black line of eyebrows, he sat down gingerly.

Colonel March seemed puzzled. "Mr. Hemphill, I should like to take you over certain points in the statement you've already given to the police. Now tell me. You knew that Mr. Arnot Wilson meant to spend several hours in flat number eleven on Friday night?"

(Chase felt rather than saw Kathleen sit up.)

"Yes, I did," said Hemphill, after clearing his throat several times like a nervous orator.

"In fact, you supplied him with the key he used to get in?"

"Yes, I did."

"And you saw to it that the light in the passage was extinguished so that he would not be seen when he did go in?"

"Yes, I did."

"Why did he want to spend some hours in that flat?"

Hemphill's bristly eyebrows seemed to stand out like antennae. "Oh, it was this crazy story about number eleven being—you know, something wrong with it. He was interested. He said he'd always wanted to see a ghost."

"Had he any other reason, Mr. Hemphill?"

"Well," repeated Hemphill, after a swift, brief look at Kathleen, "he seemed to have some idea that Miss Mills was—you know, leading a double life. He thought it was very funny; he went on and on about it. He said if he listened for a few hours in the next flat on Friday night, he could catch her red-handed with her—you know, her boyfriend." Hemphill's face seemed to swell with apology. "Look here, Miss Mills, I'm dashed sorry, and it was a rotten trick; but I didn't see any actual harm in it. That's why he didn't tell you he was there."

The very face and presence of the dead man seemed to peer into the room. Arnot Wilson had often said that he was "just interested" in things.

"Oh, no. No actual harm," said Kathleen through her teeth. "It's so

absolutely characteristic of him that I'm not at all surprised."

"Then there it is," explained Hemphill, with white-faced relief. "He took that radio along with him. You see, those flat-walls aren't very thick. He was afraid someone in one of the other flats might hear him walking about, and might call the police. His idea was that the noise of the radio would cover him. It's very difficult to locate the direction of sound, as you probably know; and he thought that when the other tenants heard the radio they would never connect it with an empty flat."

"He was right," observed Douglas Chase. "And if for once I might violate the rule of *de mortuis, I* might add that he was a damned old he-gossip who deserved what he got.

"One moment," interrupted Colonel March, whose eyes never left the letting-agent. "Admitting that he brought the radio, can you explain why he put it on with such shattering loudness that it might have roused the whole building instead of concealing his movements?"

"No, I can't explain it."

"When did you last see him alive, Mr. Hemphill?"

"About eight o'clock on Friday night. He came round and fitted up the radio in the living-room. He got rather grubby doing it, and I asked him whether he would like to wash. He said no, he would go

home and wash; then he would have some sandwiches and port there, and come back about eleven. Then he left at about eight-thirty."

Colonel March walked his fingers along the edge of the desk. He seemed even more heavily disturbed.

"Eight o'clock. Yes. It was dark then; and I think there are no lights in the flat?"

"No, there aren't any lights. But I had an electric torch."

"How did Mr. Wilson relish the prospect of a vigil in the flat alone?"

After a sort of internal struggle, as though he did not know whether to grin or stammer, Hemphill blurted it out.

"I think he was as scared as blazes, if you want the truth. He tried to hide it; it was all ha-ha, my lad, and pigeon-breasted walk; but he didn't like it one little bit. I told him there was nothing wrong with that flat! There isn't." Then the agent's grievances came pouring out. "My company says to me, 'Why did you let him do it?' I did it to show there was nothing wrong with that flat. Who's the loser by all this? I'll tell you: I am. I shall lose my job, just notice that. But I maintain I did my duty."

"And a man died. Thank you, Mr. Hemphill; that will be all for the moment. But don't go.—There is just one more witness," Colonel March added to the others, "whom you ought to hear. Inspector, will

you bring in Mr. Delafield, Maurice Delafield? Delafield has been Mr. Wilson's manservant for fifteen years."

Delafield looked it, Chase decided. He was a lean, powerful, large-knuckled man whose bodily vigour contrasted with a kind of shabbiness and tiredness in his face. His greyish hair was carefully brushed and parted. A stoop took away some of his height; and, more from a late physical illness than from fear, the large-knuckled hands had a tendency to twitch and shake.

Colonel March spoke to him almost gently.

"You were with Mr. Wilson a long time, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You liked him?"

"Yes, sir," said Delafield. His voice had acquired a sort of thunderous hoarseness; for one bad moment Chase was afraid he would break down and weep. But he stared steadily back at Colonel March.

"Now, we have just heard from Mr. Hemphill that Mr. Wilson left him at about eight-thirty on Friday night, with the intention of going home. Did he go home?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he do there?"

"You see, sir, he hadn't had any dinner, he was so excited about this ghost-hunting—if you see what I mean. He had a plate of sandwiches and three glasses of port. Then he had got himself mucked

up in the dirt at the empty flat, so he said he would have a bath and change his clothes. He was always very particular about that. He"—the pinkish tinge had come back to Delafield's eyelids; his voice was hoarse again—"he had his bath. Then he read the evening papers, all jumpy-like, and about ten-thirty he told me to fetch round the car. He drove away alone; and that's the last I saw of him alive."

"Tell me: you laid out the suit of clothes he wore that night?"

"Yes, sir. I laid it out."

Selecting a paper from a pile on his desk, the colonel handed it across.

"Here we are. Here's a list of all the things found in Mr. Wilson's pockets when the body was discovered: or in the flat itself, for that matter. 'Address-book. Fountain-pen. Key-ring, six keys. Separate key to flat number eleven. Watch and chain. Notecase with eight pounds in notes. Ten and nine-pence in silver and coppers.' Will you check this over carefully and tell me whether it is everything he took with him?"

Though Delafield tried hard, his dry fingers rustled and shook on the paper. It slipped through his fingers, and he gave it a curious despairing look, like an angler who has lost a fish.

He said desperately:

"I'm very sorry, sir. I'm not scared. Honestly, I'm not. But I haven't been well. Mr. Wilson

wouldn't even let me shave him recently; he would say over and over, over and over, 'You will be cutting my throat one of these days; and then they will hang you, because I put you in my will.'

Delafield sat down again, after picking up the paper, holding it in two hands, and putting it on Colonel March's desk. He continued to talk in the same vein until Kathleen cut him short gently.

"Does anybody doubt, please," she said, "the sort of man my esteemed Mr. Arnot Wilson really was? Or, as Dr. Chase says, whether he deserved what he got?"

"That's not true, miss! It's not!"

"True or not, it is hardly our point," interrupted Colonel March, in a tone he very seldom used. They all looked at him; his sandy eyebrows were drawn down, and his eyes were as fixed as though he were trying to draw the witness under hypnosis. "I have asked you a question, Mr. Delafield. Is that list correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're positive he took nothing else?"

"Positive, sir."

"I see. Then I am glad to inform you," observed Colonel March, "that this is not a supernatural crime nor a supernatural death."

There was a change in the atmosphere as palpable as a chilling or darkening of the room. Colonel March alone seemed unaffected by

it. On the contrary, the blood had come back into his face and he was tuned up to a ferocious geniality. For the first time he picked up a fat-bowled pipe from his desk.

"It was murder," he went on, rapping the pipe on the edge of an ashtray. "The victim did not die of fright. He died from a cause commoner and better known. I said a while ago that there was another possibility. It remains to be seen whether I can prove this. We discarded the other possibility after the post-mortem, because circumstances seemed to rule it out. And yet there is just one other way in which a man can be killed with no other symptoms, external or internal, than that terrific hammer-blow to the heart and nervous system."

Hemphill spoke in a high voice. "If there aren't any symptoms, I don't see how you can prove it, though I hope to heaven you can. But how would you kill a man like that?"

"By passing a current of electricity through his bath-water," said Colonel March. He turned to Delafield. "Would you care to tell us how you killed him, or shall I?"

Inspector Roberts rose to his feet at the other side of the room, but it was not necessary. Delafield sat with his large-knuckled hands pressed together, nodding. Otherwise he did not move: but it was as though the shabbiness of his face increased.

"It was an accident," he said.

"One moment," urged Colonel March. "I want you to understand that you are not obliged to answer—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Delafield, making an off-handed gesture. "I want these gentlemen and this lady to bear me out. I didn't mean to tell you unless you guessed it. But I didn't mean him any harm."

With the same air of toiling lucidity he unclasped his hands and held them up.

"These did it," he explained. "Maybe you know, sir, how warm Mr. Wilson liked to have the house? And how he had portable electric fires going everywhere all day?"

"Yes," said Colonel March.

Delafield nodded. "I dropped one of the electric heaters into the bath," he said. "That's all. That's how bad and simple it all was. Mr. Wilson told me I might do it. Over and over he kept telling me how I might do it, not meaning to."

"You see, sir, Mr. Wilson read in the paper long ago how several people had got killed like that. At Bristol, I think it was. Accidents. It was a cold day, and they had propped them fires up on ledges by the bath. You wouldn't think people would be foolish enough to do that, but that's what they did. Mr. Wilson didn't do that, of course. But he liked lots of heat, and he liked to have the fire standing close to the bath."

"He was frightened of things like

that. Over and over he said to me, 'Don't you do that to me, or they'll hang you for murder.' Like the shaving, you see, sir. It got so I couldn't look at an electric fire in the bathroom without being nervous. And he read up on the symptoms of being electrocuted like that, in a book called *Taylor's Medical Jurisprudence*, I think it was; him being a lawyer and all; and he was surprised at the symptoms.

"I expect I was off-guard on Friday night, with him talking so much about ghosts. He got into the bath. Then without thinking he called to me to move the heater closer to the bath. I picked it up in my hand, not thinking either. All of a sudden he shouted out to me, and said, 'Put it down, you damned doddering old fool!' and made a grab for my hand."

Again Delafield examined his hands. It was very quiet in the room. Kathleen had got up and put her own hand on his shoulder.

"It fell," he added.

"Afterwards I was afraid they would hang me, just like Mr. Wilson said, if they knew how it happened. I thought if I could pretend it happened some other way they wouldn't find out. It said in the book that the symptoms for this kind of electrocution were the same as the symptoms of death from fright; and poor Mr. Wilson had always been frightened of ghosts and the dark.

"So I moved him. First I dressed

him: which wasn't hard, because that's what I've been doing for years. I carried him downstairs. That wasn't hard either, because I'm a pretty hefty specimen, as you can see; and he wasn't what you could call big. The car was at the door. I wasn't much afraid of being seen moving him, because the night was so misty.

"I had his key to the flat, and I knew what he was going to do. I knew the light would be out in the hall leading to the flat; and the service-door was near that. I put him down in the bedroom of the flat about eleven o'clock. Then I turned on the wireless and left. I put it on loud and strong so that somebody *should* find him soon; I didn't want him lying there all that time alone.

"That's all. Maybe he was difficult, but I've served him for fifteen years, and you sort of get used to people. He didn't die hard; just a kind of a cry, and he fell back. All the same, I can't forget it, so I've been wanting to tell you. I suppose they'll hang me, but I swear I didn't mean any harm."

"Sir," Chase said, "they surely won't—"

"If he is telling the truth," said the head of Department D-3, "they assuredly won't. I question whether anything will be done to him at all. And somehow I suspect he is telling the truth. I shall turn in my report to that effect."

Kathleen blinked a little, and the

more so when Chase's fingers closed round her hand.

"May I—er—apologize for what I was thinking of you?" she said to Colonel March. "Perhaps Arnot Wilson was right after all; perhaps I do think I know too much. But will you kindly, kindly enlighten a scientific curiosity on just one point? How on earth did you know what had happened?"

"Oh, that?" grunted Colonel March, blinking and suddenly chuckling at the vehemence with which she assailed him. "That wasn't difficult. The Queer Complaints department had much more trouble with a door-bell-ringer at Hammersmith. It certainly wasn't difficult once you had grasped the crucial fact that Wilson had not died in the flat: he had been conveyed there after death.

"It seemed almost certain he had not walked there in life, because he had failed to take something he would never have gone there without. We did not find it either in his pockets or anywhere else in the flat. Everybody commented on Arnot Wilson's morbid fear of the dark. I could believe he might screw up enough courage to go there, particularly since he had the added incentive of spying on you. But I could not believe he would face the prospect of several hours alone in a supposedly haunted flat without taking along either an electric torch, a candle, or even a box of matches."

# Mignon G. Eberhart

## Date To Die

*What would you do if you found warnings that you were going to die tomorrow? That was Mr. Brown's terrifying problem. He solved it by consulting James Wickwire, an elderly banker who was a born detective . . .*

**B**UT YOU'RE NOT DEAD!" I addressed Mr. Brown, and it was a fatuous statement inasmuch as he sat opposite me, large as life and indeed larger, an effect which was due in some degree to the violently botanical design on his sports shirt.

He said, "Look at the date." I was already looking; I was, in fact, fascinated by the two objects he had proffered for my regard. One was a paper-bound club membership list which included, after the name of each member, certain vital statistics of birth, education, business, married or unmarried state and, if there was one, date of death. And someone had inked in above the printed statistics following Mr. Brown's name a rather grisly and certainly anticipatory item: Died, October 9, 1954.

The second exhibit was a fat engagement diary, opened to the date October ninth. There was one entry, scrawled in irregular but legible writing which read simply: Date to die.

It was late afternoon and so quiet that I could hear the slow

wash of the waves against the beach which lay below the pleasant house Iliff Brown had leased, and also below the resort hotel where I was spending what, up to then, had been a quiet vacation.

"October ninth," Mr. Brown said. "Today's the eighth."

This had not escaped my attention. But it was the third exhibit in his extraordinary tale which really troubled me and this, strictly speaking, was not an exhibit. I said, "You discovered both these extraordinary entries. You decided it was a joke—"

"Damned unpleasant one."

I heartily agreed with him. I went on. "However, you got to thinking of your will. You went to the safe-deposit vault in the bank. You signed in as usual; you used your key in conjunction with that of the clerk in the vault, got out your own safe-deposit box—"

"And found the slip of paper tucked into the envelope with my will! It said, *Will to be probated following Iliff Brown's death on October ninth.*"

"I wish you had saved the slip of paper."

"Well, I didn't. It upset me. I wadded it up and threw it into the wastebasket."

"You ought to have reported it to the manager of the safe-deposit department."

"I decided to forget it. It was time to go South; I had already leased this house. So we came. Nothing else happened, no threats, nothing. It was absurd to take it seriously—"

"My dear sir," I said sharply. "This is a very serious thing. Someone had to get hold of your safe-deposit key. Someone had to forge your name on the record card for the file."

My name, I should say, is James Wickwire; and the bank in which Mr. Brown had rented his safe-deposit box was the bank where I have spent most of my life; I am its senior vice-president. We have always believed our safe-deposit system to be burglar-proof.

It is the generally accepted system; the lessee of a safe-deposit box signs a card; he receives a key to the box. Another key is reserved by the vault department; both keys are required to open and extract a box. At any time the client wishes to get out his box he signs the record card; this signature naturally must correspond with the original signature. The clerk then proceeds to unlock the box, using both the vault key and the client's key. It is

a simple system, this double check, but up to then efficacious. "Have you consulted with anyone about this?" I said.

"I told one or two fellows at the club. Just by way of conversation. They thought it was a joke. I told nobody else."

"Why have you told me now?"

"Because tomorrow's the ninth."

He had a point there. If it was not a practical joke there were exceedingly unpleasant alternatives. I stared at the sinister little message in the engagement book: *Date to die*.

Mr. Brown leaned forward. "I don't mind telling you, now that it's so near the date, I've got the wind up. I heard you were staying at the hotel and I recognized your name and I—I thought I'd like to tell you about it."

"I understand that. But I really don't see what I can do."

Neither apparently did Mr. Brown. There was another silence while several waves washed in and out upon the beach. I closed the engagement book. "Mr. Brown," I said. "I am afraid I must ask you a rather personal question. Would anybody, say, close to you—"

He broke in. "I've thought of that. Somebody close to me would have to get my key. Somebody close to me would have to study my signature in order to forge it and get into my safe-deposit box. It's too big a vault, too many people have boxes there, for the clerks in the

vault to know your face—unless you visit your box far more often than I do. Yes, it would have to be somebody close to me.

"But there's nobody close to me who would do it. I am not married. I have no near relatives. I am not a rich enough man to offer any inducement for—well, let's face it—for anybody to murder me in order to get hold of my money. And I haven't got an enemy in the world."

This is a rash statement for a man of fifty-odd to make. However, I could only accept it.

I had seen two feminine figures in and about the house and the beach. I said, "You are not alone here."

"Oh, no. My ward, Joan Baker, has made her home with me since she was a little girl. I made out with a string of housekeepers when she was younger and at home only for vacations. But she got out of school this spring and Willie took over."

The young blonde girl I had seen must be the ward, Joan Baker. The other woman, older, was a faded, thin little thing who looked as if once she had been very pretty, and scurried nervously about the place and smiled all the time. "Willie?" I said.

"Edith Willever. She was my secretary—oh, for years. I thought Joan ought to have somebody around to run the house, chaperone her—that kind of thing. Willie's not very efficient but she's

like one of the family." He sighed. "As a matter of fact, this is Willie's birthday. We're having a little celebration tonight, just the four of us."

"Four?"

"A young friend of Joan's is spending a few days with us. Name is Francis Danielo. Young fellow from Brooklyn. Leads a dance band." He brooded. "Joan calls him Danny."

I said, not very astutely, "You don't approve of their friendship."

"They're talking of marriage. Joan's too young. And she's got money—or will have when she's twenty-one and that's next year. I want her to look around before she marries, take some time, know what she wants."

In the house a clock struck six. Mr. Brown heaved himself up and came to the desk and gathered up the two books with their ugly little messages. I watched while he locked them in a drawer.

"This is all nonsense, of course," he said. "A joke. What else could it be?"

We both knew what else it could be. I said, "Have you taken any measures of protection? Merely in the event that it's not a joke?"

"Yes," he said shortly and patted a bulge beneath his tentlike sports shirt which I took to be a gun. He then gave me an embarrassed glance. "Don't know why I got worked up like this. There's nothing to it, of course. Nothing you

can do about it. Sorry I bothered you."

He walked across the lawn with me toward the hotel. We parted at the hibiscus hedge.

Once back at the hotel I put in two telephone calls to New York and went into dinner.

There is a general impression that banks, and bankers, are surrounded by all but impenetrable red tape; in a sense, perhaps, this is true. At the same time, when necessary, there are some short cuts through that red tape. And since our business concerns people and their money, two somewhat explosive commodities, we are more or less prepared for emergency.

By the time I had finished dinner I received one reply to my telephone inquiry. Iliff Brown, I was informed, was the perfectly reputable owner of a small but solid brokerage business. He had administered his ward's estate properly and successfully, augmenting a moderate inheritance to a substantial fortune. There was no suggestion of any sort of hocus-pocus.

The reply to my second telephone call came a few moments later and was equally positive. And very perplexing.

So perplexing indeed that after some thought I effected a change of rooms for myself, from the south end of the hotel to the north end. Once my effects were resettled, I went to the windows which, as I

had expected, overlooked the house beyond the tall hibiscus hedge. It was then nearly midnight, and the beginning of October ninth.

The house was already dark. In all probability nothing would happen. And in any event, to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and Mr. Brown was both. Nevertheless I got into pajamas and a dressing gown and prepared to watch. As it developed I had not long to wait.

Yet when it happened there was nothing to see—no lights, no movement around the house, only a sound like the explosion of a large firecracker. But within seconds, lights began to spring up in the house beyond the hedge. Someone flung open a door and shouted "Murder!"

I dressed swiftly but by the time I got downstairs there were sounds of police sirens shrieking through the night and a little knot of excited hotel guests on the lawn outside. I clutched somebody's arm. "What happened over there?"

He gave me a wild look. "Murder! Shot through the heart."

"Brown?"

"No, no, his housekeeper! Miss Willever. Shot—" He broke off as the sirens swooped into the drive of the house next door. "There's the police!" he cried.

So murder had occurred, and on October ninth. But it wasn't the murder of Mr. Brown. I took a quiet path down to the sea, around the end of the hibiscus hedge and

up toward the house, which by then was alive with lights, policemen, and general commotion. Mr. Brown, huge in a striped purple and white dressing gown, was in the middle of it. A dark young man, clad airily in white tennis shorts and a brown suntan, hovered on the edges. The policemen surged like a wave into the house and Mr. Brown saw me. He seized my hand and wrung it convulsively.

"They got her!" he babbled. "They got her instead of me. It was dark—she was downstairs—whoever killed her was waiting. He thought it was me and shot her—"

He gave my hand a last convulsive grasp and followed the policemen into the front door. The young man in tennis shorts had disappeared. I went into the house, too, and as none of the group in the living room seemed aware of my presence—indeed, their attention was riveted upon a sad and tragic object on the floor—I went on to the quiet little study where Mr. Brown and I had talked that afternoon.

It wasn't a practical joke. It was in deadly earnest. Except Miss Edith Willever, poor woman, was the victim of it. And I really did not know what to do, but I had to do something.

Eventually, I decided to join the commotion still going on in the front of the house, and was about to do so when the door of the

study was flung open and a girl rushed in, gave me a frightened look, and turned as if to rush out again. It was the girl whose blonde head and, I might say, extremely attractive figure in swimming costume, I had seen on the beach and about the house—in short, Mr. Brown's ward, Joan Baker. She was now wearing a white terry-cloth bathrobe which she clutched childishly around her. I said, "Please come in. I'd like to ask you some questions."

She gave me another terrified look and burst into tears.

I am and intend to remain a bachelor, but I am not insensible to beauty in distress. It seemed my clear duty to supply a shoulder for her to weep upon and, I daresay, a few impersonal pats on her blonde head. I was thus occupied when the door was flung open again and the swarthy young man stalked in.

Now, I have observed that persons from Brooklyn—the Dodgers, for instance—have a certain gift for direct and forceful action. Nevertheless, I was surprised to find myself flat on the floor without at all knowing how I got there. Oddly, too, my jaw was thrusting its way up through the top of my head. The girl flung herself at young Danielo. "He's only a policeman. He wants to ask some questions."

It seemed prudent, just then, not to correct her impression. As she hung firmly onto his arm, I got somewhat cautiously to my feet

and summoned what dignity I could. I then rubbed my jaw and the young man said in a menacing way that he didn't like cops. "But I'll tell you exactly what I told the other cops and that's all I know. I was asleep. A shot woke me. It was dark. Then lights went on in the hall and I could hear Mr. Brown running downstairs. So I jumped up and ran down, too. She was dead. Brown sent me to phone for police. He ran outdoors and shouted for help. Joan came down and I told her what had happened. We started to search the house and grounds. Then the police got here. And keep your hands off my girl."

The girl said chidingly but fondly, "Oh, Danny! Watch your temper!"

"Did you see the gun?" I asked.

He gave one shake of his black head. "Mr. Brown has a gun," he volunteered. "He was showing it to the other police. It was still on his beside table. It had not been fired."

Tears welled up in Joan's lovely eyes again. "Oh, it's so terrible," she cried unevenly. "This was her birthday! We all gave her presents and she was so happy and—"

"What were the gifts?" I asked. "Anything valuable?"

"Nothing valuable enough to steal! And besides, they weren't stolen. She—" she gulped. "She's still wearing the watch—Uncle Iliff gave her a lapel watch, with diamonds on it. I gave her a gold cig-

arette case and Danny gave her flowers."

She began to sob again, which appeared to be in the nature of a last straw for Danny, for he gave me a look of fury and said:

"She can't answer any questions now! *Get out!*" He drew her to the door, and in a gesture designed to induce me to comply with his demand, snapped out the lights. He then said, "My gosh."

There was something awestruck in his voice coming out of the sudden darkness. The girl cried out, "*Danny! What did you do to him?*"

"My gosh," Danny said again. "I didn't mean to hit that hard! You're blue!"

I found the switch and snapped on lights. There was a mirror on the wall and I looked into it. My jaw was slightly red, but that was all. Danny said in the same awestruck voice, "It's gone! But it *was* there—" He snapped off the lights again, and I had rather a shock: for there was a kind of bluish sparkle streaked along my jaw.

After a moment I said into the darkness, "Bring me Miss Williver's birthday gifts. Hurry."

Possibly my voice, as well as the spectral and peculiar qualities my jawbone had assumed, suggested urgency. Within a moment, which I spent in turning the lights off and on before the mirror and making the rather unnerving discovery that one hand had also developed an

oddly streaked and slightly blue visibility in the darkness, the girl returned, staggering with the weight of a huge vase of red roses, which she put down on the desk. She then fished out of her pocket a lapel watch—a charming jeweled trinket with a safety clasp—and a gold cigarette case. "They let me have them," she said. "But the chief of police wants to know what business it is of yours."

"Bring him here," I told her. "And Brown and Danny too."

She went away. I snapped off the lights. They came running, all four of them. A strange voice—that of the chief of police, it developed—yelled, "Turn on the lights!"

Someone obliged, but not before I had seen what I expected to see. The police chief was a tall, thin man in uniform and he yelled, "What's the idea?"

So I told him. "My dear sir," I said. "I am obliged to give you certain information. First, I wish to say that Mr. Brown has been a most careful and honest guardian for his ward, Miss Joan Baker. He has had a power of attorney for her; he has administered her property since the death of her parents, and has been most conscientious."

Brown put his arm around Joan and drew her to him. Danny glowered. Iliff Brown said, "I discharged my duty to the best of my ability."

"But you killed Miss Willever."

I said it so quietly that for a moment nobody took it in, but only

stared at me in a kind of thunderstruck but definitely skeptical manner. So I turned out the lights again and seized Brown's right hand. In the darkness the luminous bluish streaks along his finger showed quite clearly. He jerked it away from me and ran for the door.

There were a few moments of more or less violent activity out in the hall. Then the police chief returned. He snapped on the lights. "What do you mean? They've got him but what—"

He stopped as I extended the lapel watch to him. I then detailed the story Mr. Brown had told me. "But, in fact," I concluded, "This was a careful plan to murder Miss Willever in such a way that Brown himself would be perfectly safe, inasmuch as it would be believed that he, not Miss Willever was the intended victim and that the murder of Miss Willever was a mistake, since the murderer had intended to shoot Mr. Brown. Therefore the murder had to be accomplished under conditions in which such a mistake was possible—in fact, in total darkness. However, in total darkness, the murderer had to supply himself with a target. In short this—" I was still waving the lapel watch. I said, "Turn out the light, please."

Danny did so. The girl said, "Ooooh." The police chief gave a startled grunt. The lapel watch, too, showed up in a luminous, circle.

I told them what was now obvi-

ous enough. "It's luminous paint. It is very sticky and hard to remove. Visible in the dark but looks merely like white enamel in the light. The paint stuck to Brown's hands, you see. He seized my hand when I arrived in what I can only call an excessive show of gratitude. Some of it rubbed off on my own hand and onto my jaw."

I think Danny gurgled here in a rather apologetic manner. The chief snapped on the lights and the glow faded to a milky white. He said, "Why would he kill her?"

My jaw ached. I said shortly, "I'm afraid that's your problem. However, I might suggest that while Miss Joan referred to Brown as Uncle Iliff his—er—embrace of his ward was not exactly avuncular. It occurs to me that Brown wished to marry his ward—and her money."

The girl blushed. "Yes," she whispered. "Yes, he did."

I said, "Since Brown did not embezzle his ward's funds, he did not murder his former secretary to keep her quiet about that. Yet I do feel that Miss Willever had a very strong hold on him of a nature which was likely to block Brown's intention to marry his ward. So I rather think you'll find that Miss Willever was secretly Mrs. Brown."

A curious expression of enlightenment flashed into Joan's face. "Oh!" she cried. "That explains it—she *was* in love with him. I always knew it! She'd have done any-

thing for him. Anything! But she wouldn't have let him—"

"Marry you," I finished.

The chief of police rubbed his long nose. "But, see here! If all this is true, what put you onto it?"

"My dear sir!" I said, really quite shocked. "The safe-deposit box, of course! Our vault is quite impregnable! Such a thing as Brown described simply could not happen. I got in touch with the head of the vault department who informed me that Brown's signature on his file card was not a forgery. Therefore I knew Brown was lying. Therefore I wondered why."

"Why did he tell you about these threats he faked?"

"He had to have a witness, of course. Somebody who could say that he, not Miss Willever, was the object of murderous threats. Oh, by the way, I imagine the murder gun, a second gun, is at the bottom of the ocean. Tossed across the beach."

The girl flung herself fervently upon me, both arms around my neck. "Oh, I was so afraid they'd say Danny did it. He's impulsive."

The police chief scooped up the watch and dashed for the front hall, shouting, "Hold him!"

And Danny moved toward me.

I wrenched myself from the girl and dashed out the door, too. Danny, however, caught me in the hall. I braced myself, but he gave me a hurt look. "I was only going to shake hands," he said. "Thank you, Mr. Wickwire."

# Michael Gilbert

## Murder by Jury

*Inspector Hazlerigg recalls a "perfect crime" . . . by one of the most prolific of contemporary British writers whose stature in the mystery field grows with each of his new books.*

**P**ossibly you could describe the snake," said Counsel.

"Certainly. It was gray, with a mottling of red. Not crimson, darker than that. A sort of plum-colored red."

"Yes. Go on, please."

"The underbelly, which was towards me, as it reared its head to strike, was also gray, but lighter. Toning down almost to white in the center."

"Was there anything else?"

"Yes. Its size. It was as thick as two of my wrists together."

"I see. What happened next?"

"I seized it, just below its head, with both my hands together. My hands were turned inwards. I squeezed with my fingers and dug in my thumbs, and I felt the snake twist and squirm and flog its head from side to side as it tried to escape."

"And then?"

"Then I woke up. I was kneeling beside the bed. It was my wife's neck which was between my hands and her throat I was squeezing. She was dead."

"That's an extract," said Chief Inspector Hazlerigg, "from the examination of Edward Mason, on trial for the murder of his wife, Freda Mason. In my studied opinion he was one of the most thoughtful, cold-blooded, successful murderers we ever failed to hang."

"I read about it," I said.

"He got a lot of publicity," agreed Hazlerigg. "Acquitted murderers always do. It was my case, you know. And I can see, now, that I was outmaneuvered . . ."

The case really started at 6 o'clock in the morning in the Caledonian Hotel at Chaffham-on-Sea, a small health resort on the Norfolk coast.

It started with a succession of loud screams from a bedroom on the first floor. "Horrible and unforgettable," was how one witness described them.

The manager jumped from his bed, and, with one of the servants and two other guests, ran along to the room. The door was opened by Mr. Mason, who was apparently in a state of breakdown. He was in

pajamas, disheveled and wild-looking, the pajama jacket being torn. He kept staring at his hands and the only words he spoke, according to different accounts, were "I killed her" or "I strangled her."

The manager forced his way past, into the room, and found Mrs. Mason's body lying half out of the bed. He sent for the police and a doctor.

When Mr. Mason was fit to talk he made a statement, and at no time afterwards did he substantially vary this statement at all. He said that he had had a dream. He was fighting with a large snake. He took the snake in his hands and throttled it. He woke up and found that he had throttled his wife. The dream was one which he had had before, but never with fatal results.

He added that "he had loved his wife very dearly."

The local police could make nothing of this. Mr. Mason was not a local man. The fact that he had happened to kill his wife while staying at Chaffham was, they implied, entirely fortuitous. They handed the matter over, with some relief, to London and the case was given to Inspector Hazlerigg for consideration. A coroner's jury returned a quite unhelpful open verdict . . .

Hazlerigg disliked the case from the first. The essential information, as he appreciated, was locked up inside Mr. Mason's mind and provided he kept his head under cross-examination it was never going to be unlocked.

"The way I look at it is this," said Hazlerigg—he was holding an off-the-record discussion with the Director of Public Prosecutions. "Supposing we had one of those hidden witnesses you read about—I've never struck one personally, but you know the sort of chap I mean. He's up on a cliff with a telescope and he happens to be looking in at the bedroom window. He sees Mason get out of bed, walk round, bend over the bed and strangle his wife. So what? What does it prove? How are we to know if Mason was sleep-walking, or if he had all his wits about him?"

"I agree," said the Director of Public Prosecutions. "As it stands at the moment there's much less than a 50-50 chance of a conviction. If anything else turns up, well, we'll have to think again."

The next thing that turned up was Mrs. Mason's brother, Hector. He was a great big, hefty person, with a bull neck and hands like a pair of warming pans covered with red fur.

He said: "Did the police know that Mason had insured his wife's life for £10,000?"

Hazlerigg said "Yes. That did come to light. In fact, they had both insured each other's lives—not an uncommon arrangement with married people. Also, the insurance was by no means recent. It was first taken out when they married and had been successively increased. The last increase—a big one, it was true,

from 5 to 10 thousand—had been made more than three years ago."

"If you'd known Ted Mason as I did," said the brother, "you'd have realized that was just like him. A far-seeing, cold-blooded fish. And another thing—that business about loving his wife was the most arrant flapjack. The two of them were hardly on speaking terms."

"Can you bring evidence of that?"

"Certainly," said brother Hector. "And one thing more. There was another woman." He gave details.

"The fact of the killing's undenied," went on the brother. "There's your motive. If you don't prosecute I'll raise such merry hell in the Press that you'll find a new Commissioner at Scotland Yard before the year's out." . . .

"I don't think the threat moved us much," said Hazlerigg. "Our hides are so thick, that little private darts like that don't stick. But when we put the new facts up to the D.P.P. he came down on the side of prosecution. Indeed, it might be said that in fairness to Mason himself we could hardly *not* prosecute. The thing had to be cleared up.

"I may say straight away that the evidence about the other woman turned out to be quite inconclusive. The brother swore that she was Mason's mistress. She swore that she had never even seen him.

"Macrea was defending when the case came up at the Central Criminal Court, and my goodness, his handling of that brother was mas-

terly. He went into the box looking like a cross between Bulldog Drummond and the Archangel Gabriel and when he came out there was hardly enough left of him to cover a sixpence.

"Macrea took the obvious line that Hector was a nasty-minded, prurient busybody, who had never liked his brother-in-law and had never lost any opportunity of blackening his character. How did he know about these alleged passages between his brother-in-law and this other woman? Had he been hiding behind the curtains? Or under the bed? And so on. The art of the thing was the way he got the chap admitting to the most absurd prejudices—he convicted him time and time again out of his own mouth.

"Nevertheless, making a fool out of a witness is a two-edged weapon, and when the prosecution closed I could see what was in the jury's mind as clearly as if they had said it out loud.

"This chap Hector may be a fool," they were thinking. "He didn't show up too well in the box. But that doesn't mean that everything he said is untrue. There's no smoke without a fire. And there have been one or two other witnesses who gave evidence that things were not entirely happy between Mr. and Mrs. Mason. No open quarrels, but, of course, if Mason is the deep-dyed villain the prosecution is making him out to be, he would have taken good care to avoid open quarrels.

Perhaps it isn't true about the other woman—we didn't much like that part of the evidence. But you can't argue away the insurance. Mason does stand to collect £10,000. If he *didn't* murder her, then undeniably she died as the result of an accident, and the insurance company will have to pay up and look pretty. That's not disputed. But *did* he murder her? That's the simple point. Really when you get down to it, most of the evidence is practically irrelevant. That's the question we've got to answer. We are rather inclined to think that he may have done it, but that, of course, is not enough. We'll have to wait and see how he shapes in the box."

Mason made an excellent witness.

He avoided the prime fault of a prisoner who gives evidence in his own defense—he didn't protest too much.

He admitted small quarrels between himself and his wife. Married life, he said, was like that. You had differences of opinion and you made them up. The jury liked that. A lot of them were married themselves.

He dealt fully with the question of life insurance. The total amount of the benefit, he said, depended on the premiums you could afford to pay. When he was beginning in business, and his earnings were increasing slowly, he had added gradually to the annual premium. Three or four years ago he had made rather large profits and had been able to double the premium. In recent trou-

blesome times his earnings had dropped—he was an importer—and he had not therefore been able to add to the premiums at all. He had not reduced them, because that would have been uneconomical.

("You notice incidentally," said Hazlerigg, "how neatly he gave them a point and then took it away again. The prosecution would certainly have elicited, in cross-examination, that he had recently been losing money and this would have constituted an extra motive for murder. By announcing the fact in advance he robbed it of half its sting.")

Mason denied flatly ever having seen or spoken to the other woman in the case.

Of the events which led up to the strangling of his wife he spoke almost objectively, without any undue display of emotion. He was always ready to give the fullest and most careful details, and he never contradicted himself. And even so, he avoided sounding too pat. He would remember some extra detail when questioned, or introduce some unimportant point, confessing that he had forgotten about it before. If he was lying, people couldn't help feeling that it was some of the most perfect and painstaking lying they had ever heard.

Nevertheless, the jury was not quite happy about it.

Juries go further by instinct than people think. And as every additional fact pointed the other way, their instincts only told them more

clearly that the man in the dock was a dangerous man. Had they been forced to put their feelings into words, the only sort of argument they could have put up was something like this: "The facts show that he did strangle her. He is plainly a quiet, controlled sort of person—not, on the face of it, very likely to have nightmares and to run amok. We would like some positive evidence that what he says is true. That he really did it in his sleep."

Looking back on it, in the light of after-knowledge, one can see that this was precisely the point which Mason wished them to reach. The timing of his defense was admirable. Having erected this thin screen of doubt he proceeded to demolish it.

The next witness was his sister. She was two years older than he was. A gray-haired woman, a middle-class intellectual, and a good witness.

She started by recalling when she had slept with her brother—at a time when such a practice was respectable and indeed normal, their ages being ten and eight respectively. She remembered very well the night when her brother had had a dream and had tried to strangle her. She did not think that the dream, on that occasion, had been about a snake. So far as she recollects the incident, it had occurred on the night after they had visited a matinée performance of Peter Pan. Her brother had been very alarmed by

the crocodile in the next to the last act—the jury would probably remember it—and he had dreamed that the crocodile was chasing him. He had turned on her and got a good grip of her throat. He was a strong boy for eight and if nurse hadn't come running in she didn't like to think what might have happened.

Cross-examination could make very little headway against this. She agreed that it was a long time ago, but an experience like that was not a thing which one was likely to forget. She particularly remembered it because from then on—until Edward finally went to boarding school—she had not been allowed to sleep in the same room with him.

You could see that the jury were shaken.

The next two witnesses completed the job.

The first—I won't give you her real name—we'll call her Lulu.

Macrea, introducing the witness, indicated that there might be passages in her evidence which would give offense, but plainly where life and death were involved, certain reticences had to go by the board.

Lulu proved to be a pleasant and extremely self-possessed woman in her middle thirties. She was not leading a life of extreme rectitude, but she admitted—as the dullest member of the jury by now appreciated—that she had at one time been on the streets. She was giving her evidence of her own free will and

because she couldn't stand by and see a man accused of something he obviously hadn't done.

Three or four years ago she had spent the night with the prisoner. It was the only time she had ever set eyes on him, but it wasn't an occasion she was going to forget in a hurry. At about 6 in the morning she had wakened to find him throttling her.

She was a strong and active woman and she had managed to fight her way free.

He had produced some garbled story about a dream and a snake, to which she had not paid much attention, being at the time both frightened and furiously angry.

The prisoner, however, had behaved very handsomely. He had given her £10 to soothe her feelings, and—more—had appeared so genuinely anxious and upset that she hadn't the heart to take the matter further. Her first intention had been to go to the police.

When Counsel for the Crown got up to cross-examine he found himself in a position of unexpected difficulty.

It is easy enough to throw ridicule on these poor women, and their evidence doesn't often count for a great deal in a court of law. But the fact of the matter was that she was plainly risking a wounding cross-examination together with a lot of calumny and unpleasant notoriety with no possible motive except to save an innocent man.

In a way, the more he hurt her, the less good he did to the Crown's case.

One must remember, too, that the witness had been sprung on him. Macrea had made it plain that the prisoner had been against Lulu giving evidence at all. It was at her insistence, and because his advisers had thought it essential, that she had been allowed to speak.

There was only one line that the prosecution could follow—and they hunted it for all it was worth. The whole story, they said, was a fabrication. It had never happened. The prisoner had simply purchased the testimony of this woman to bolster up his own defense. On the face of it, asked the prosecution, did the prisoner look the sort of man who could have had associations with a woman of this type?

Macrea must have grinned.

His next, and final, witness was the doctor who had attended Lulu for bruises on her throat. He confirmed the date from his attendance diary. He also recognized the prisoner, who had come with Lulu and settled the bill.

The jury acquitted without retiring.

"And if I'd been on the jury I should have done the same," I said. "The man was innocent."

"He was guilty," said Hazlerigg.

"Then the evidence was faked—"

"On the contrary. Every witness spoke the truth according to their

lights. So far as that goes, even Mason himself spoke the truth, about everything except the one vital point —what went on inside his own head."

"Are you asking me to believe," I said slowly, "that Mason was such a diabolical man that he started plotting the murder of his own wife at the age of *eight*?"

Hazlerigg put back his head and laughed heartily. He rocked with laughter. While he was laughing I began, dimly, to see the weakness in my argument.

"Now don't start blaming yourself," said Hazlerigg. "Because that's exactly what every member of the jury thought, in that instant when they acquitted him. After all, you can't expect all jurymen to be practising philosophers. If they had only been acquainted with the dialectical trick known as *deception* by series."

"Explain."

"All right. I'll give you an example of the basic notion. Then when you want to plan your own murder you can work out the details for yourself. Supposing I have to deceive you about—say—the number of my house. For some reason it's not practical to alter the number plate itself. But I can take it down altogether or hide it. I lead you up the street, and point out that the two houses before you come to mine are numbered 2 and 4. You won't need much convincing, then, about the number of my house, will you?"

"Six."

"So you might think. Actually my house is 4. I altered the number plate of the house on the left—which was really 3."

When I'd worked this one out on the back of an envelope, I said, "I think I see it. You mean that Mason —"

"When he decided to murder his wife about three years before he actually did it, he took a precaution. He remembred the incident of himself and his sister. I have no doubt the story was perfectly true, though it may have become exaggerated a little with the passing of the years. Just the sort of thing any excitable little boy might have done. He knew that his sister remembered it, too. Having got his true 'number,' he thereupon manufactured the false 'number.' He went out and picked up this woman—Lulu. He slept with her. In the early hours of the morning he started to strangle her. He didn't go very far, of course, just far enough to produce some convincing bruises on the throat. Then he quieted her down by paying her a good deal of money—I don't suppose she'd really have gone to the police, you know, they're shy birds—and he took her to a doctor and paid for the necessary medical attention. Incidentally, it was about the same time, did you notice, that he doubled his wife's insurance. Then he let three years go by. Then he strangled her."

"Knowing that any jury with

those facts would acquit him."

"Yes. There was just one practical difficulty, and he surmounted that as well. His three witnesses were his sister, the doctor, and Lulu. The sister he would always be able to get hold of. The doctor—even if he retired—would be in some medical directory or easily traceable. The girl was different. They move, from time to time, and get swallowed up very easily in the whirlpool of the West End. How was he to keep track of her unobtrusively? The method he adopted was to send her £10 a month, anonymously. He represented himself as some well-wisher who had received her favors in the past and wished to make this periodical contribution. So long as she kept him notified of any change of address, he would send her the money."

"But if she had to notify him when she moved, surely she must have known who he was."

"No—the notification had to be sent to him at a Post Restante under an assumed name."

"How long did it take to find out?"

"Well, it took some weeks. We were only doing it to satisfy our own curiosity. But in the end we found the Post Restante and the girl gave us a definite identification. She picked Mason's photograph unhesitatingly out of a dozen others. He'd been calling for letters on and off for the last three years."

"Wasn't he running a considera-

ble risk," I said. "Supposing you'd got on to this before—"

"When the defense are allowed to spring last-minute witnesses on you!" said Hazlerigg. "How do you think we were going to unearth all this in five minutes between examination and cross-examination? That's why they kept Lulu up their sleeve until the last moment."

"So you're absolutely certain that Mason did this murder, but you can do nothing at all about it. That's it, isn't it? You can't try him again, of course, for the same offense."

"That's what he thought," said Hazlerigg. He was smiling, but his gray eyes were bleak.

"Some time later—more than a year after the trial—Mason was staying at a little hotel in Cornwall. He was still single—I never had much confidence in that story of the other woman. Even if it was true he certainly never married her. He had a bedroom with a small balcony overlooking the cliff with a straight drop onto the rocks. The maid went to call him one morning, found the window unlatched and the balcony rail broken. What was left of Mason was on the rocks, 50 feet below."

"Then you were wrong," I said. "You were all wrong, from beginning to end. He did walk in his sleep."

"Possibly," said Hazlerigg. "Possibly. There was certainly no sign of foul play. One curious coincidence came to light later. Brother Hector had the room next door."

# Charlotte Armstrong

## Ten Clues for Mr. Polkinghorn

*Mr. Polkinghorn could visualize the newspaper headline: NOTED MYSTERY WRITER SOLVES POLICE PROBLEM IN REAL LIFE. It was duck soup for a man with a trained deductive mind who had no less than ten clues to work with . . .*

MR. AMOS POLKINGHORN, 49, CREATOR of Daniel Dean, Ace Detective (whose cases no lending library would be without), walked down the driveway of his suburban home one morning to peer up the street for the mailman. The mailman was not even on the horizon. Mr. Polkinghorn, walking back, was very much startled to see, on the edge of the glass curtains in the window next door, a set of fingers.

This was odd, because the house next door was empty. The family was away.

The fictional Daniel Dean would have taken this without the quiver of an eyelash. But Mr. Polkinghorn found his own mouth dry, his knees weak, his heart flopping. He staggered to refuge within his front door and took a full minute to get his breath before he called the police.

Nor, during the interval before they came, could he think of a single clever ruse. Meanwhile, the mailman appeared. Mr. Polkinghorn did absolutely nothing to

warn the mailman. He watched (taking care not to let his own fingers or any other part of him show at his window) as the mailman went up upon the Arnolds' porch, put the letters in the slot, and returned to the sidewalk as safely as usual. Mr. Polkinghorn, much relieved, reminded himself that he, Mr. Polkinghorn, was actually doing all a citizen is expected to do; that it was only his occupation that engendered this self-reproach and made him feel that he *ought* to have disguised himself as the mailman. Or something.

By the time the police came, in the shape of a couple of men in plain clothes, Mr. Polkinghorn had managed to work himself into an attitude of intrepid curiosity more becoming to a well-known mystery-story writer. He observed that the plainclothesmen had no ruse. They marched around, found the Arnolds' back door unlocked, and nobody in the house.

On the kitchen table, however, was a big fat clue. The situation suddenly had a certain piquancy.

The police officers' names were Conners and Farley. They knew who Mr. Polkinghorn was, and what he did, and they didn't mind telling him all they knew about this real-life mystery. In fact, Mr. Polkinghorn noted within himself, the situation was classic. The regular police were presenting the amateur criminologist with a pretty little problem:

Mr. Polkinghorn sat at the Arnolds' kitchen table and listened, lifting his somewhat snub nose in unconscious longing for the hawk-like profile of his figment of the imagination, Daniel Dean.

Conners said, "Well, sir, this plain cloth cap was made and worn in the State Prison. No doubt about that. Now, ten days ago, three convicts escaped. The alarm's still out. But we *know* what happened to two of them. Seems, one night a week ago, two men showed up in a boatyard upshore a ways, and knocked down a fella fussing with his sailboat. The fella didn't get a good look, but he knew they were convicts, all right, from what he heard them say. So the convicts took the boat and went off into the Sound. Boat capsized in a quick squall. Witnesses to the wreck searched all night, but found no bodies. Haven't found them yet. But those two couldn't have made it to shore. So we *know* that two of those three men got themselves drowned. Now, sir, according to the evidence of this cap, the *third*

escaped convict must have hole up in this house for the last week or so. Question is, which?"

"This matters?" said Mr. Polkinghorn, casting a keen glance upward. "Yes, I see."

"Matters, because if you got the alarm out for a man, it's better to know who the man is," said Farley. He was youngish and had a nice Irish grin.

"Very interesting." Mr. Polkinghorn pursed his lips.

"You saw his fingers less than forty minutes ago. He couldn't have got very far. Maybe he'll be picked up. Then again, maybe not." Conners implied vast police machinery in motion. "Be easier if we knew which one we were looking for."

"One ought," said Mr. Polkinghorn thoughtfully, "to be able to deduce that." The two policemen were respectfully silent. "How did he dare hide in this house? How did he know it was empty and would remain empty?" mused Mr. Polkinghorn, his wits beginning to work in familiar grooves.

Conners said, "Because this Mrs. Arnold, she pinned a note on the back door for the milkman. Here it is. Says: 'No milk for ten days. Says: 'Back Tuesday, the tenth.'"

"And that's tomorrow," Farley said. "The man could read, I guess."

"A reasonable deduction," said Mr. Polkinghorn exhibiting Daniel Dean's most charming smile.

"Well, we got the Arnolds on the hone and they're hurrying right ack. Be here in a coupla hours. 'robably they can tell us if anything's missing, for instance."

"It's quite possible," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "that in the meantime we can discover something. I doubt very much, gentlemen"—he was talking just like Daniel Dean, he couldn't help it—"whether a man can remain in a house for a week's time and leave no traces of his personality. We should be able to find those traces. That is, if you can tell about the personalities of these three convicts."

"Tell you what we know?" said Conners. "Sure."

Mr. Polkinghorn took out pencil and paper. He was thrilled and happy. He saw the publicity already. *Noted Mystery Writer Solves Police Problem in Real Life.* "It was," he could hear himself saying with a twisted smile, "elementary."

"One of them," said Conners, "was named Mario Cossetti. Age 3. Caucasian. Five foot five. 155 pounds. Dark hair, dark eyes. Dark complexion. Artificial right foot. Lost foot in action—navy man. Up for armed robbery. This is kind of thing you mean?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Polkinghorn, scribbling delightedly. "Anything more about his background?"

"New York City. Lower East Side. Never finished high school."

"Very good."

"Yeah. Well, then there was Glenway Sparrow. Age 42. Caucasian. Five foot eleven. 125 pounds. Gray eyes, gray hair." Conners warmed up to this work. "Never in the service. 4-F. Ex-editor. College man. Up for conspiracy to defraud. A con man, from way back. I hear," said Conners in a gossipy fashion, "Glen was real mad at the Judge. Also, he's supposed to be mean and brainy and nervous about his health."

Mr. Polkinghorn was making neat columns out of this information.

"Third fella was Matthew Hoose. Age 24. Six foot one. 195 pounds. Red hair, blue eyes. Had two years service in the army, where his record is only fair. Went up for manslaughter. Fight in a bar. Comes from Kentucky. Unemployed at time of arrest. Just an unlucky kid, I guess."

"What do you say, Mr. Polkinghorn?" Farley grinned. "Maybe I should have asked, what Daniel Dean would say."

Mr. Polkinghorn rose. He was expanding, happily at home in the safe province of the inquiring mind. "Daniel Dean would look around the house," he announced. "May I?"

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold, with their boy, Bob, and their little girl, Ginny, had gone down to the seashore for Mr. Arnolds' two weeks vacation. They had long been very pleasant neighbors to Mr. Polking-

horn. Just an ordinary suburban family. Not, of course, his intimates, for they were hardly intellectuals, and besides, they were no fans of Daniel Dean. Nor was there anything about them to make fodder for Mr. Polkinghorn's imagination. Nods and good mornings passed over the hedge, amiable agreements about shoveling snow, and so on. Mr. Polkinghorn had never before set foot in his house.

Now, however, he prowled through it, through every room, with his eyes darting, his brain buzzing furiously. It was a big old rambling house, stuffed full of all kinds of objects, and the tour took Mr. Polkinghorn some time.

At last, however, he sat down again in a kitchen chair and spread his notes on the kitchen table. Farley was already sitting down, yawning a little. Conners, who had trailed Mr. Polkinghorn and stimulated him to lip-pursing and eye-rolling by his stolid presence, now sat down too. These policemen had to wait for the Arnolds' return, anyhow. They were quite willing to listen when Mr. Polkinghorn looked up from rearranging his notes.

"It is a nice little problem," he announced. "A very nice one indeed."

"Whatja find?" said Farley sleepily.

"What," said Mr. Polkinghorn somewhat dramatically, "do you make of that?" He indicated a

small dirty scrap of paper on which something had been written in blurring worn pencil marks.

*Tom may let ida po but asp sa bag.*

Farley picked it up and read off the nonsense syllables. "Wherja ge this?"

"Under a chair. How did the escape from that prison?" snapped Mr. Polkinghorn, in Daniel Dean's crisp voice. "With outside assistance?"

Conners stared.

"This code message," said Mr. Polkinghorn shrewdly, "must have served a purpose." They both stared at him respectfully. "I suggest it belonged to Sparrow," said Mr. Polkinghorn. "Why? Because he was the brains. I think we may say that if there was a code message from the outside, it would have gone to Sparrow. However, he went on, joyfully dragging it the red herring just as he would have done in Chapter Two, "on the bookshelf in the living room there is a cotton sock. Perhaps you noticed it? New, clean, never worn. One blue-and-white cotton sock." He paused. They didn't respond. "Why only one?" prodded Mr. Polkinghorn. "Did Cossetti, the one-footed man, help himself to one clean sock to comfort his living foot? Not bothering about the artificial one?"

"See what you mean," said Conners, though somewhat doubtfully. "Not conclusive at all, of course,"

said Mr. Polkinghorn. "Although I find two more slight indications that point to Cossetti."

"How many indications you got there?" inquired Conners amiably.

"Ten," said Mr. Polkinghorn. "Of which *three* point to Cossetti, *one* points possibly to Matthew Hoose, *one* may well eliminate him, and *five* of my little indications point, or so it seems to me, to Sparrow."

"So you'd say it was Sparrow?"

Mr. Polkinghorn didn't like people jumping to the end of the story. He liked the exposition for its own sake. "Let me continue," he said, chidingly.

They were silent.

"Now, to go on with Cossetti," he said. "You have noticed that on the kitchen counter, there, we see seven empty cans. Perhaps it is significant that they have not been thrown out to be collected. Perhaps the man who ate the contents of those seven cans did not wish them to be seen." His listeners nodded. "All seven of those cans," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "once held spaghetti."

"Italian!" said Farley. "And that's Cossetti." He looked awed.

"Exactly. Now, I did not care to touch it since its position may be significant, but under the dining-room table you may have noticed a long rope-like affair, made of neckties, knotted together."

"Saw that," said Conners. "What's it for?"

Mr. Polkinghorn simply had been unable to imagine what it was for unless the unfortunate had thought of suicide—but surely not under the dining-room table! So he shrugged and said, "Whatever it is for, if you examined the knots, you saw that they are elaborate and all different. Whoever made that thing knew his knots. Didn't you tell me this Cossetti was in the navy?"

Their faces were blank—stunned, he supposed. Mr. Polkinghorn cleared his throat. "But let us leave Cossetti for the moment and go on to Hoose. You noticed the empty liquor bottle? The *only* empty one? There is quite an ample and variegated supply in Mr. Arnold's liquor closet. But the kind that has been most recently taken is . . . bourbon."

"Kentucky!" said Farley. "Say, I'm getting on to this! What d'ya call it? Deducing?"

Mr. Polkinghorn was rather suspicious of the glance that now passed between the two plain-clothesmen. It had a wink-like quality. He went on somewhat loftily, deliberately abandoning the suspense hovering about Hoose. "To return to Sparrow. Now, none of the beds, as you undoubtedly noted, seem to have been disturbed: I can only imagine that the man, knowing himself to be hunted, preferred to snatch his sleep on the couch downstairs where he could more easily escape if anyone came. You ~~unmarked~~ remarked the afghan? The

crushed pillows? Next to that long green couch in the living room you must have seen, on the coffee table, those two empty aspirin bottles. Isn't it true that this man, Sparrow, was the only one of the three in less than robust health? He is the very thin man, the 4-F, the brainy, nervous, highstrung one. *He* would have been the one of the three to take aspirin." Mr. Polkinghorn swam along, his confidence increasing. "Also, you may have noticed the pile of old magazines on the floor in there. The scissors? Did you notice that small pieces have been clipped out of those magazines? Did you not tell me that this Sparrow was angry at some Judge? Can you not imagine that he may have been composing an anonymous threat of some kind? Isn't it a well-known dodge to clip the words of the message from a magazine?" Mr. Polkinghorn could see by their faces that this was not going down very well. "A flight of fancy, perhaps," he said hastily, "but after all, the man was hiding here, all alone, and for so long a time. How *did* he occupy himself?"

"Eating spaghetti," said Farley faintly.

"I'll tell you what he did by daylight," said Mr. Polkinghorn. "He read. And what did he read? He read some very highbrow, intellectual books. He read, for instance, *The Secret History of the American Revolution*. He read a large

volume of *William James*. Also, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*."

"How do you know?"

"Why, there are six such books on the living-room table, all out of obvious gaps in the shelf." At this point Mr. Polkinghorn experienced a little bit of a qualm for he had never known and wouldn't have suspected that his neighbors owned, let alone read, books like these. But he threw the fleeting and somewhat chastening enlightenment away. "The next to the last clue," he pronounced, "is in the negative. It has to do with Arnold's clothing. Mr. Arnold is a large man. Now, we do not find any clothing here that pertains to the State Prison, except that cap. It seems likely that our prisoner would have changed his prison-made garments for a suit of Mr. Arnold's—if he could have. But he didn't."

"How do we know he didn't?"

"Where are the clothes he would have discarded?" asked Mr. Polkinghorn triumphantly. "Now remember those descriptions. Cossetti was short: five foot five. Couldn't have worn Arnold's clothes. And by the same token neither could Sparrow, who was so terribly thin. Hoose probably could have worn them. But nobody did. It wasn't Hoose. Therefore." To pronounce the word "therefore" at the end of a chain of reasoning was Daniel Dean's trademark, and Mr. Polkinghorn used it with relish.

"How does it add up, again?" asked Conners, dubiously.

He's lost, thought Mr. Polkinghorn complacently; don't suppose he is a chess player.

"Ten points," the mystery writer recapitulated, glancing at his own neat handwriting where the points were listed in columns under the three names. "The sock for his one foot, the spaghetti for his Italian taste, the knots in the rope of neckties for his sailor's skill—these three point to Cossetti. But we must remember *against* Cossetti the fact that he, the sailor, might be the leader of the two unfortunates who stole, of all things, a boat."

"Listen," said Farley, rather apologetically, "they didn't *do* so good with the boat. Also, Cossetti was on a battleship, which is not quite the same thing."

"Now, the bourbon," Mr. Polkinghorn went on blithely, "does point faintly toward Hoose. But the clothing that has *not* been discarded here points clearly away from him and cancels out the bourbon. Whereas"—he rapped the table with his pencil—"the code message, the highbrow reading matter, the clipped magazines, the aspirin bottles, all point to Sparrow. And *this*," he said complacently, "seems to me to settle it."

"What's that, sir?"

"This," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "comes from the green couch in the living room and is a gray hair. Hoose had red hair. Cossetti's was

black. But Sparrow has gray hair." He leaned back, placing the pencil between his lips, and murmured, as Daniel Dean would have done, "Sparrow. Therefore."

The two plainclothesmen looked uneasy—in fact, unconvinced. Farley had his brows way up and his lids way down and the stretched, blank flesh where the eyes should have been looked skeptical indeed. Conners was actually squirming. "I think I hear a car," he said. "Must be the Arnolds."

Mr. Polkinghorn sat at the kitchen table, rolling the pencil in his lips. Ah, well, he was thinking, I've told them so. Therefore I can always say I told you so. Of all glad words—he paraphrased—de dum de dum, the gladdest are—I told you so. Ah, well, he'd enjoyed his trifling exercise. One could always make a pleasant little article out of it and turn a penny, and, of course, non-fiction was the thing today.

Then Farley broke his dream by coming back into the kitchen with Mr. Arnold, who smiled and hailed him. "Hi, neighbor! Got *your* fancy brains to working on this crime, I hear."

"We'd like to know, sir . . ." Farley began.

"Don't ask *me*, Sergeant," said Mr. Arnold humorously. "Kitty's roaring through the house." They could, indeed, all hear rapid footsteps upstairs. "She and the kids will spot anything there is to spot.

It's no use asking me. I just pay the rent around here." He sat down and lit a cigarette—a big careless easy-going man. Mr. Polkinghorn couldn't help knowing that Mr. Arnold wan't shaken in the least by this affair. "Stranger than fiction, huh?" said Mr. Arnold genially. "Well, well . . ."

"I wonder," said Mr. Polkinghorn, with an easy smile, "whether you could tell us about the bottle of bourbon."

"I can't stand bourbon," said Arnold immediately.

"Then you did not empty that bottle?"

"Eh? Oh, that," said Arnold. "Forgot to put it out in the trash can, didn't I? Well, as I say, I can't stand bourbon myself, but a chap from the office dropped by, the night before we left—to pick up the threads, you know, while I was gone. *He* likes bourbon, so I got rid of it on him. Why?"

Polkinghorn drew his pencil across his list, under Hoose.

"What is all this?" said Arnold.

But Mrs. Arnold now came bursting through the swinging door. She was a plump little person with a great mass of chestnut hair that was not very tidy. She wore a cotton dress with a sweater over it. She had a pack of envelopes in her hand. "Fine bunch of mail, Jim," she said to her husband, disgustedly. "It's 90 per cent bills, as far as I can see. Oh, hello, Mr. Polkinghorn." She gave him a museum-

type look—she usually did—as if her prim, withdrawn, and solitary neighbor was a kind of exhibit. "I don't see a thing gone," she told the detectives, "except food. You say it was a criminal? Is *he* gone? Did you look in the cellar?"

"We looked, Ma'am," said Farley.

"None of your husband's *clothing* is missing?" asked Mr. Polkinghorn briskly, concerned with his little list.

"I don't think so," she said. "His blue suit is at the cleaner's. I asked them to hold it because he only needs that for business. What—?"

With a little confident smile, Mr. Polkinghorn was drawing a line across the name of Mathew Hoose.

"Sit down, Ma'am," said Farley, "if you don't mind, and let's talk about this a little bit."

"Right," said Conners, who had come in after her.

"Okay," she said. "I told Bobby to stay upstairs, but don't think he won't be listening behind the pantry door." She dropped the mail on the table and clasped her hands. "What can I tell you?"

"The thing is, we'd like to know *which* escaped convict was in here." Farley explained the little problem. "Now, Mr. Polkinghorn, he's got some ideas . . ."

"Busman's holiday? Ha, ha," boomed Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Polkinghorn was frowning wisely at his notes. He spoke up in a businesslike voice. "First, I wish you would tell me if you can,

what is the meaning of the rope of neckties?"

"What rope of neckties?" said Mr. Arnold, with a dropping jaw.

"The one under the dining-room table."

"Bobby tied Ginny to the stake the day it rained," said Mrs. Arnold pleasantly.

Her husband said, "With whose neckties?"

"Now, Jim, you said you wished somebody would take pity on your weakness. You know you can't resist your favorite old ties even though the cleaner simply does not get them really clean. You said yourself . . ."

"You gave 'em to Bob!"

"I couldn't find any rope and he said he wanted to practice for his merit badge . . ."

"Knots," said Farley. "Boy Scout, is he? Yeah."

"I guess that takes care of my complex about my favorite old ties," said Bob's father, resignedly. And then to Mr. Polkinghorn, "What about them?"

But Mr. Polkinghorn was making another pencil line, under Cossetti, this time. "The one unused sock in the living room?" he inquired.

"Oh," said Kitty Arnold in a minute, "you mean the *fourth* sock?"

"The *fourth* sock?" Mr. Polkinghorn had a brief vision of a four-legged man which he sternly dismissed.

"I made a rag doll for Ginny to take in the car, you know," she explained. "It takes three dime-store socks. You know." Mr. Polkinghorn *didn't* know—he'd never heard of such a thing! "So, of course, the fourth was just left over. But," she went on comfortingly, "if I'd had twelve socks and made four dolls, the way I did for the Bazaar, why, it would have come out even." She beamed at them.

Mr. Polkinghorn was crossing off the sock. He was thinking that Cossetti was fading out of the picture nicely, and he was not at all displeased. "Just to clear this away," he said, "tell me about those spaghetti cans."

"Do that," said Mr. Arnold. "Tell them, Kitty."

Kitty Arnold's plain face began to get pink.

"Seven cans," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "and all spaghetti. Is this what the man ate, would you say?"

"Well, no," she said, "I guess I *will* have to explain that. There was a church Supper—pot-luck, you know?" Mr. Polkinghorn *didn't* know. "There wasn't time," Mrs. Arnold continued. "We were packing to go away. So I took spaghetti for my contribution, but it wasn't homemade. I cheated," she confessed. "Oh, I threw in a little seasoning and nobody knew the difference . . ."

"She's just a fraud," said her husband lovingly. "At the Church,

too. At least, in the basement."

Mrs. Arnold blushed deeper. "But the silliest thing was not to throw out all nine cans at once," she told them. "I guess I felt kind of guilty, I was afraid somebody might—well—notice. So I threw two out and washed the rest . . . they are perfectly clean. But I thought I'd get rid of them later, two at a time."

Mr. Arnold laughed heartily while Mr. Polkinghorn crossed off the third and last item under Cossetti and then his pencil came up and drew a line through that name. No logician on earth, Mr. Polkinghorn was thinking crossly, could have divined the real meaning of those spaghetti cans.

"What'd this man eat, then, Mrs. Arnold?" asked Farley.

"Meat, I guess," she said. "And bread. I had at least two loaves in the freezer and the chopped meat looks awful low to me."

"Listen," said Mr. Arnold, "that doesn't necessarily mean a thing. This family does away with one heck of a lot of hamburger."

"We don't seem to be getting anywhere with these points," said Conners, throwing an impatient glance toward Mr. Polkinghorn. "Suppose you tell us what else you know about this man, Mrs. Arnold."

"Oh, I'd say he slept in Bobby's bed and read all Bobby's comic books," said Mrs. Arnold.

"What makes you think that?"

"Because the bed's so neat," she replied. "The corners are made hospital style which I never bother to do. And so is the stack of comic books neat—neater than Bobby Arnold ever piled them."

Mr. Polkinghorn shook his head, just slightly. It was almost a tremble. "May I go on, please?" he asked in Daniel Dean's most silken voice. "Tell me, please, why are bits clipped out of all those magazines?"

"Just Bobby. I never saw such a boy for 'sending away' for things."

"Natural born sucker for coupons," said Mr. Arnold.

"And Ginny collects rabbits," said Mrs. Arnold. "Pictures of rabbits. Since Easter. *Nothing's* safe."

Mr. Polkinghorn's head had begun to swim—quite perceptibly. But he reminded himself, that his point about the clippings had really been very far-fetched. He drew a line through it, and pressed on. "Those aspirin bottles in the living room? Who put them there?"

"Jeepers," said Kitty Arnold, casting her eyes down, "You are sure going to think I'm an awful housekeeper, Mr. Polkhorn."

"You put them there?" Mr. Polkinghorn felt a real alarm.

"They're Jim's," she said. "He had the gripe a couple of weeks ago and nothing would do . . . he wasn't going to stay upstairs in his bed and miss television. So he languished in there on the living-room couch. And I never did get around

to throwing out those bottles. But why do you ask?"

Nobody answered. Mr. Polkinghorn marked the aspirin bottles off his list and then he raised the pencil and crossed off the clue of the gray hair, too. His neighbor, Jim Arnold, had a head of pepper-and-salt and there just was no reliable significance in . . . He looked with some dismay on the case for or against the man, Sparrow. There were only two points left. Two, out of them all. And nobody was speaking. Were the policemen embarrassed for him? He lifted his head and drove hard with the one point he had felt certain about.

"Well," he said with just the faintest sneer, "if our friend was upstairs reading comic books, who took out and read those six volumes on the livingroom table?"

Mrs. Arnold began to giggle. "Well," she said, controlling herself so that the giggles changed to mere dimples in her plump cheeks, "nobody was *reading* them, Mr. Polkinghorn. That is, not recently. You see . . ." She must have divined the chagrin Mr. Polkinghorn was feeling because she began to sound soothing. "If you knew the family better, Mr. Polkinghorn, and some of our habits . . . but then no stranger could. We have a little projector for throwing transparencies on the wall. Jim was showing some of them to the man from his office. The table's just too low," she said. "It takes those six thick

books under the projector . . ."

"I . . . see," said Mr. Polkinghorn, struggling not to seem as disgruntled as he was Daniel Dean, *himself*, couldn't have guessed there had been a projector! Impossible! "I suppose *this* is perfectly clear to you, too?" he said bitterly, and tossed her the last clue of all, the mysterious symbols.

"This?" she said in a wondering tone. "Now where in the world did you find that?"

"Under a chair," he said, gloomily.

"It's an old one," she said.

"An old *what*, Mrs. Arnold?" said Farley gently.

"What *is* it?" She looked at it closely. "Tomatoes, mayonnaise, lettuce, Idaho potatoes, butter, asparagus, sandwich bags," she read off glibly. "Why, it's a grocery list, of course. When did we have asparagus, Jim, and baked potato?"

"Never mind," Mr. Polkinghorn folded his list. He didn't care to throw it away in this house. He thought she might giggle. Her husband might guffaw. He thought, crossly, the whole affair would make good fiction, at least. His clues *should* have meant something. If these people didn't live in such a ridiculous giddy human kind of way. . . .

"So," said Farley thoughtfully, "we know nothing about this guy but that he reads comic books."

"Who," said Mr. Polkinghorn bitterly, "doesn't?"

Mrs. Arnold sensed that here

was some wound she didn't fully understand. She had tact. She busied her fingers with the envelopes on the table before her. "Jim," she said suddenly and indignantly, "that darned telephone company has done it again! We don't know anybody in Paris, Kentucky, to call Long Distance."

"What!" said Farley. —

"If you'll excuse me," said Mr. Polkinghorn with a really gruesome smile. He went out the kitchen door and through the hedge and back to his sane, neat, lonely house . . .

It was the younger one, Farley, who came around the next day to talk to Mr. Polkinghorn. "Thought you might like to know the upshot," he said kindly. "It was Matthew Hoose, all right. He's just a big dumb wild kid. Went along for the escape because it seemed a good idea at the time. Didn't like the company he had. So they parted. He found the Arnold house and read on the back door how long it would be empty. So he goes right in, the night of the thirty-first, and calls up his mother back in Paris, Kentucky, and asks her for some money. Says he's no thief. All he took was the meat and the bread. So his mother *mailed* him the money. That's why he was watching for the mailman. He knew it was his last day there and he was getting anxious. Oh, they picked him up. Sure. Easy. In the railroad station. He's not," said

Farley gently, "so terribly bright. Although the army did manage to teach him how to make a bed."

"It was kind of you to come," said Mr. Polkinghorn graciously. "Thank you very much."

"Maybe life's *not* quite so strange as fiction," murmured Farley and he smiled his nice smile.

"For my part," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "I think the old saw holds."

He went back to his work table. He was plotting a new one for Daniel Dean. His glazed eye looked out of the window. After a moment, it began to see.

Mrs. Arnold was making for her car with two henna-colored blankets over her shoulder. Bobby trailed after with both hands held together as if some precious thing were within the cup they made. Mr. Polkinghorn saw the mother glance into the cup of the boy's hands and nod and smile. The little girl, Ginny, was trailing a long white string after her on the grass. There was nothing on the end of the string. They all got into the car. Ginny sat on the two blankets. The boy had had nothing in his hands because now he was clapping them in a gay rhythm.

Mr. Polkinghorn sighed. He looked back at the paper and put a dainty little check mark on one of his notes. *Murderer must be ambidexterous.*

As for his neighbors, they were to him then and would remain forever an impenetrable mystery.

# Lord Dunsany

## The Speech

*One of the most ingenious short-short stories ever to appear in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" . . . another classic by the author of that never-to-be-forgotten tale of horror, "The Two Bottles of Relish" . . .*

**C**RIME," SAID THE OLD JOURNALIST one night at his club. "One reads a good deal about violence nowadays; but I never read of a crime that would make a story like the one that there was when I was young. *That* would have made a story. But it was all hushed up."

"No doubt for some good reason," a younger journalist said.

"Yes," said the old journalist. "It had to be. They were extremely careful not to disturb the peace of Europe in those days. That, you see, was what the crime was about. There was a young man, scarcely remembered now, brilliant though he was—the Honorable Peter Minch. His old father you would never have heard of. A totally obscure old peer, Lord Inchingthwaite. But people heard of Peter Minch in his time. He was an M.P. and the coming man of the Opposition, one of those coming men that you never hear any more of.

"At the time that I tell about, he was going to make a speech in the House. Things had been simmering for some time. What this young

fellow was going to say just at that time wasn't going to help the peace of Europe at all. What he was going to say would have prodded Austria pretty hard; and, if Germany had supported her in what would have been quite justifiable resentment, Russia would not have liked it, and the fat would have been in the fire. But there was no stopping Minch. He was a bit of a firebrand. The government couldn't stop him, of course. And as for the Opposition, he was their fancy man, and they were probably thinking more of how it would embarrass the government than annoy the Austrians."

And then (the old journalist went on) the extraordinary thing happened. A man walked into the central office of Minch's party, without giving his name, and said quite clearly that he had sure information that was not exactly a message, and must not be taken as a threat but only a warning, that that speech would never be made.

"What do you mean?" said the Chairman of the Party.

"I mean," said the man, "that there is an organization with which I have nothing to do, nothing whatever, who are determined to stop that speech, and who are powerful enough to do what they threaten. It is not I that threaten. I came to warn you."

"Do you mean," said the Chairman, "that they are going to use force?"

"They will use whatever is necessary," said the stranger. "We—that is, *they*—consider war to be the greater evil."

"War?" said the Chairman. "Who says we are making war?"

"Their information," said the stranger, "is that what Mr. Minch is going to say just at this time will bring war nearer. They are well-informed, and they have told me they are convinced that causing the death of one man is preferable to the risk of disturbing the peace of Europe."

Well, as politely as possible, the Chairman told him to go to hell. And as the man left, he said, "That speech will not be delivered. Under no circumstances will it be, in the House."

The Opposition told Scotland Yard. And *they* took the matter up at once, and assured the Chairman of the Party that the entire police force of the metropolis would be available. Police protection on an enormous scale was given to Minch at once.

I think Scotland Yard must have

known more than they ever told about the organization that was making that threat, because they said at once that the man that had called on the Chairman of the Party would have been a man named Hosken. And that's who he turned out to be. The Chairman asked them then if they would arrest him. But the chief inspector said: Better not—better leave him at large, and he might give them more information. And he did.

The Chairman of the Party was sitting in his office with a burden removed from his mind, for he felt that the police had everything well in hand, when in walked this extraordinary man again. They let him come in, because they wanted to hear what the fellow had to say. They addressed him by his name this time, and I think it gave the Chairman a little childish pleasure to imply by doing so that they knew all about him.

"Well, Mr. Hosken," said the Chairman, "is there anything more that you wished to tell us?"

A faint smile from Hosken greeted the use of his name. And then he said, "Only to say that all those policemen will not enable Mr. Minch to make that speech and start a debate in Parliament, while things are as they are just now abroad."

"If Mr. Minch desires to speak in the House, as he has every right to do, he will certainly do so," said the Chairman.

"I have come to say," said Hos-

ken, "that if he will put it off, so as to give things time to simmer down, the powerful organization with which a friend of mine is in touch will take no action."

"If you mean by 'things' the state of affairs in Europe, we are not concerned with them. No one in Europe can deny us free speech," said the Chairman.

"It would be an open defiance," said Hosken, "and would lead to war."

"You must understand," the Chairman said to Hosken, "that we cannot tolerate any more blackmail."

"Certainly, sir," said Hosken. "Only there will be no speech in Parliament by Mr. Minch for at least a week. And, if you stop him peacefully, there will be no need for violence."

Then he smiled and walked out.

Well, that's how things were (went on the old journalist)—tension rather acute, and this fiery young man going to start a debate in the House that would put all the fat in the fire, and perhaps set it overflowing and scalding all Europe, and a powerful organization of blackmailers—for they were nothing less—determined that that debate should never take place, and that one man's murder was nothing compared to war. And against the blackmailing gang was practically the whole of the police force of the metropolis. I needn't go into the precautions taken by the police.

They took them all. Minch was constantly under observation by at least two of them. I doubt if anyone was ever more watched in London.

They soon ran Hosken down, but did not arrest him. All they did was to keep him under observation. I fancy they thought that he would be more useful to them that way.

On a Wednesday morning everything was all ready. Minch was going to speak at 7 that evening. His whole family were going to be there, his old father in the Peers' Gallery, and all the rest of his family in the Ladies' Gallery. The police had a cab for Minch which was entirely bulletproof, even to windows of plate glass that was over an inch thick.

Well, the precautions were more than would have been taken for moving bullion from the Bank of England. They asked Minch to be at the House by 3 o'clock.

As he and his police escort arrived, a messenger boy handed a note to the inspector in charge of the guard. He opened it and saw an anonymous note, saying: *Mr. Minch will not make that speech today.* He smiled, because once inside the precincts of the House of Parliament murder was quite impossible.

Minch's family were to arrive at half past 6. At 3 o'clock, a dull debate opened. And yet the tension was electric, for everyone present knew the threat of the gang. The

dignity of Parliament was at stake, and most of the members, even on the side to which Minch was going to cause so much trouble, put that first. Slowly the tension heightened, as the clock moved round to 4.

And in that heightened tension everyone seemed to know what everyone else was thinking. They knew when any speaker was intending to be funny, and all laughed quickly and nervously, even before the little joke came.

And then, at five minutes past 4, a note for Mr. Minch was handed by a policeman to the inspector, who passed it to the sergeant-at-arms, who went into the chamber and gave it to Minch. Minch opened it and turned white.

"My father is dead," he said to a member beside him. "He's been murdered."

"I am terribly sorry," said the other man. "What happened?"

Minch handed the note to him. His father had been shot dead in his house. The murderer had escaped.

"And your speech," said the other member. "I am afraid—"

"No," said Minch. "That can't stop me. Nobody could be sorrier

than I am. But private grief is one thing, public duty another."

"But, look here," said the other member. "I mean—you're a peer."

"I'm a what!" said Minch.

"You're a peer now," said the other again.

"My God!" Minch answered.

Well, that was the end of that. The gang had done it. They attacked as any man of sense would always attack, at the weakest point, where nobody was expecting it. And nobody did think of poor old Lord Inchingthwaite. He was quite obscure. But the moment he died, Peter Minch became a peer, and could make no more speeches of any sort in the House of Commons.

And he couldn't even make his speech in the House of Lords, until he had taken his seat, and all that took time. He did make the speech at a meeting that week in what had been his constituency, but Austria took no notice of that.

"So war was averted," said the young journalist.

"Well, yes," said the old journalist. "Not that it made any difference in the end."

# Rex Stout

## Santa Claus Beat

*The creator of Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin tells the short tale of a "tough cop" who was cynical about Christmas and had no use whatever (he said) for the Yuletide spirit.*

CHRISTMAS EVE," ART HIPPLE WAS thinking to himself, "would be a good time for the murder."

The thought was both timely and characteristic. It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon of December 24, and though the murderer would have got an eager welcome from Art Hippel any day at all, his disdainful attitude toward the prolonged hurly-burly of Christmas sentiment and shopping made that the best possible date for it. He did not actually turn up his nose at Christmas, for that would have been un-American; but as a New York cop not yet out of his twenties who had recently been made a precinct dick and had hung his uniform in the back of the closet of his furnished room, it had to be made clear, especially to himself, that he was good and tough. A cynical slant on Christmas was therefore imperative.

His hope of running across a murderer had begun back in the days when his assignment had been tagging illegally parked cars, and was merely practical and professional. His biggest ambition was promotion to Homocide, and the shortest

cut would have been discovery of a corpse, followed by swift, brilliant, solo detection and capture of the culprit. It had not gone so far as becoming an obsession; as he strode down the sidewalk this December afternoon he was not sniffing for the scent of blood at each dingy entrance he passed; but when he reached the number he had been given and turned to enter, his hand darted inside his jacket to touch his gun.

None of the three people he found in the cluttered and smelly little room one flight up seemed to need shooting. Art identified himself and wrote down their names. The man at the battered old desk, who was twice Art's age and badly needed a shave, was Emil Duross, proprietor of the business conducted in that room—Duross Specialties, a mailorder concern dealing in gimcrack jewelry. The younger man, small, dark and neat, seated on a chair squeezed in between the desk and shelves stacked with cardboard boxes, was H. E. Koenig, adjuster, according to a card he had proffered, for the Apex Insurance

Company. The girl, who had pale watery eyes and a stringy neck, stood backed up to a pile of cartons the height of her shoulder. She had on a dark brown felt hat and a lighter brown woolen coat that had lost a button. Her name was Helen Lauro, and it could have been not rheum in her eyes but the remains of tears.

Because Art Hippel was thorough it took him twenty minutes to get the story to his own satisfaction. Then he returned his notebook to his pocket, looked at Duross, at Koenig, and last at the girl. He wanted to tell her to wipe her eyes, but what if she didn't have a handkerchief?

He spoke to Duross. "Stop me if I'm wrong," he said. "You bought the ring a week ago to give to your wife for Christmas and paid sixty-two dollars for it. You put it there in a desk drawer after showing it to Miss Lauro. Why did you show it to Miss Lauro?"

Duross turned his palms up. "Just a natural thing. She works for me, she's a woman, and it's a beautiful ring."

"Okay. Today you work with her—filling orders, addressing packages, and putting postage on. You send her to the post office with a bag of the packages. Why didn't she take all of them?"

"She did."

"Then what are those?" Art pointed to a pile of little boxes, addressed and stamped, on the table.

"Orders that came in the afternoon mail. I did them while she was gone to the post office."

Art nodded. "And also while she was gone you looked in the drawer to get the ring to take home for Christmas, and it wasn't there. You know it was there this morning because Miss Lauro asked if she could look at it again, and you showed it to her and let her put it on her finger, and then you put it back in the drawer. But this afternoon it was gone, and you couldn't have taken it yourself because you haven't left this room. Miss Lauro went out and got sandwiches for your lunch. So you decided she took the ring, and you phoned the insurance company, and Mr. Koenig came and advised you to call the police, and—"

"Only his stock is insured," Koenig put in. "The ring was not a stock item and is not covered."

"Just a legality," Duross declared scornfully. "Insurance companies can't hide behind legalities. It hurts their reputation."

Koenig smiled politely but non-committally.

Art turned to the girl. "Why don't you sit down?" he asked her. "There's a chair we men are not using."

"I will never sit down in this room again," she declared in a thin tight voice.

"Okay." Art scowled at her. She was certainly not comely. "If you did take the ring you might—"

"I didn't!"

"Very well. But if you did you might as well tell me where it is because you won't ever dare to wear it."

"Of course I wouldn't. I knew I wouldn't. That's why I didn't take it."

"Oh? You thought of taking it?"

"Of course I did. It was a beautiful ring," she stopped to swallow. "Maybe my life isn't much, but what it is, I'd give it for a ring like that, and a girl like me. I could live a hundred years and never have one. Of course I thought of taking it—but I knew I couldn't ever wear it."

"You see?" Duross appealed to the law. "She's foxy, that girl. She's slick."

Art downed an impulse to cut it short, get out, return to the station house, and write a report. Nobody here deserved anything, not even justice—especially not justice. Writing a brief report was all it rated, and all, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it would have got. But instead of breaking it off, Art sat and thought it over through a long silence, with the three pairs of eyes on him. Finally he spoke to Duross:

"Get me the orders that came in the afternoon mail."

Duross was startled. "Why?"

"I want to check them with that pile of boxes you addressed and stamped."

Duross shook his head. "I don't need a cop to check my orders and shipments. Is this a gag?"

"No. Get me the orders."

"I will not!"

"Then I'll have to open all the boxes." Art rose and headed for the table. Duross bounced up and got in front of him and they were chest to chest.

"You don't touch those boxes," Duross told him. "You got no search warrant. You don't touch anything!"

"That's just another legality." Art backed off a foot to avoid contact. "And since I guessed right, what's a little legality? I'm going to open the boxes here and now, but I'll count ten first to give you a chance to pick it out and hand it to me and save both of us a lot of bother. One, two, three—"

"I'll phone the station house!"

"Go ahead. Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine . . ."

Art stopped at nine because Duross had moved to the table and was fingering the boxes. As he drew away with one in his hand Art demanded, "Gimme." Duross hesitated but passed the box over, and after a glance at the address Art ripped the tape off, opened the flap of the box, took out a wad of tissue paper, and then a ring box. From that he removed a ring, yellow gold, with a large greenish stone. Helen Lauro made a noise in her throat. Koenig let out a grunt, evidently meant for applause. Duross made a grab, not for the ring, but for the box on which he had put an address, and missed.

"It stuck out as plain as your nose," Art told him, "but of course my going for the boxes was just a good guess. Did you pay sixty-two bucks for this?"

Duross's lips parted, but no words came. He nodded, not vigorously.

Art turned to the girl. "Look, Miss Lauro. You say you're through here. You ought to have something to remember it by. You could make some trouble for Mr. Duross for the dirty trick he tried to play on you, and if you lay off I expect he'd like to show his appreciation by giving you this ring. Wouldn't you, Mr. Duross?"

Duross managed to get it out. "Sure I would."

"Shall I give it to her for you?"

"Sure." Duross's jaw worked. "Go ahead."

Art held out the ring and the girl took it, but not looking at it because she was gazing incredulously at him. It was a gaze so intense as to disconcert him, and he covered up by turning to Duross and proffering the box with an address on it.

"Here," he said, "you can have this. Next time you cook up a plan for getting credit with your wife for

buying her a ring, and collecting from the insurance company for its cost, and sending the ring to a girl friend—all in one neat little operation—don't do it. And don't forget you gave Miss Lauro that ring before witnesses."

Duross gulped and nodded.

Koenig spoke. "Your name is not Hipple, officer, it's Santa Claus. You have given her the ring she would have given her life for, you have given him an out on a charge of attempted fraud, and you have given me a crossoff on a claim. That's the ticket! That's the old yuletide spirit! Merry Christmas!"

"Nuts," Art said contemptuously, and turned and marched from the room, down the stairs, and out to the sidewalk. As he headed in the direction of the station house he decided that he would tone it down a little in his report. Getting a name for being tough was okay, but not too damn tough. That insurance guy sure was dumb, calling him Santa Claus—him, Art Hipple, feeling as he did about Christmas.

Which reminded him, Christmas Eve would be a swell time for the murder.

# Georges Simenon

## A Matter of Life and Death

*A short novel by the creator of Inspector Maigret—told with deep-rooted realism, with scrupulous attention to detail, with intimate knowledge of the people, the places, and the procedural methods of a Parisian manhunt . . . and above all, with compassion and understanding.*

AT HOME WE ALWAYS USED TO GO to Midnight Mass. I can't remember a Christmas when we missed it, though it meant a good half-hour's drive from the farm to the village . . . ”

The speaker, Sommer, was making some coffee on a little electric stove.

“There were five of us,” he went on. “Five boys, that is. . . . The winters were colder in those days. Sometimes we had to go by sledge. . . .”

Lecoeur, on the switchboard, had taken off his earphones to listen.

“In what part of the country was that?”

“Lorraine.”

“The winters in Lorraine were no colder thirty or forty years ago than they are now, only, of course, in those days the peasants had no cars. How many times did you go to Midnight Mass by sledge?”

“Couldn't say, exactly . . .”

“Three times? Twice? Perhaps no more than once. Only it made a great impression on you, as you were a child.”

“Anyhow, when we got back, we'd all have black-pudding, and I'm not exaggerating when I tell you I've never had anything like it since. I don't know what my mother used to put in them, but her *boudins* were quite different from anyone else's. My wife tried, but it wasn't the same thing, though she had the exact recipe from my eldest sister—at least, my sister swore it was. . . .”

He walked over to one of the huge, uncurtained windows, through which was nothing but blackness, and scratched the pane with a fingernail.

“Hallo! There's frost forming. That again reminds me of when I was little. The water used to freeze in our rooms and we'd have to break the ice in the morning when we wanted to wash. . . .”

"People didn't have central heating in those days," answered Lecoeur coolly.

There were three of them on night duty. *Les nuiteux*, they were called. They had been in that vast room since eleven o'clock, and now, at six on that Christmas morning, all three were looking a bit jaded. Three or four empty bottles were lying about, with the remains of the sandwiches they had brought with them.

A lamp no bigger than an aspirin tablet lit up on one of the walls. Its position told Lecoeur at once where the call came from.

"13th arrondissement, Croulebarbe," he murmured, replacing his earphones.

He seized a plug and pushed it into a hole.

"Croulebarbe? . . . Your car's been called out—what for?"

"A call from the Boulevard Masséna. . . . Two drunks fighting."

Lecoeur carefully made a little cross in one of the columns of his notebook.

"How are you getting on down your way?"

"There are only four of us here. Two are playing dominoes. . . ."

"Had any *boudin* tonight?"

"No. Why?"

"Never mind. I must ring off now. . . . There's a call from the 16th."

A gigantic map of Paris was drawn on the wall in front of him, and on it each police station was

represented by a little lamp. As soon as anything happened anywhere, a lamp would light up and Lecoeur would plug in to the appropriate socket.

"Chaillot? . . . Hallo! . . . Your car's out? . . ."

In front of each police station throughout the twenty *arrondissements* of Paris one or more cars stood waiting, ready to dash off the moment an alarm was raised.

"What with?"

"Veronal."

That would be a woman. It was the third suicide that night, the second in the smart district of Passy.

Another little cross was entered in the appropriate column of Lecoeur's notebook. Mambret, the third member of the watch, was sitting at a desk filling up forms.

"Hallo! Odéon? What's going on? . . . Oh, a car stolen. . . ."

That was for Mambret, who took down the particulars, then phoned them through to Piedboeuf in the room above. Piedboeuf, the teleprinter operator, had such a resounding voice that the others could hear it through the ceiling. This was the forty-eighth car whose details he had circulated that night.

An ordinary night, in fact—for them. Not so for the world outside. For this was the great night, *la nuit de Noël*. Not only was there the Midnight Mass, but all the the-

atres and cinemas were crammed, and at the big stores, which stayed open till twelve, a crowd of people jostled each other in a last-minute scramble to finish off their Christmas shopping.

Indoors were family gatherings feasting on roast turkey and perhaps also on *boudins* made, like the ones Sommer had been talking about, from a secret recipe handed down from mother to daughter.

There were children sleeping restlessly while their parents crept about, playing the part of Santa Claus, arranging the presents they would find on waking.

At the restaurants and cabarets every table had been booked at least a week in advance. In the Salvation Army barge on the Seine tramps and paupers queued up for an extra special.

Sommer had a wife and five children. Piedboeuf, the teleprinter operator upstairs, was a father of one week's standing.

Without the frost on the windowpanes they wouldn't have known it was freezing outside. In that vast, dingy room they were in a world apart, surrounded on all sides by the empty offices of the *Préfecture de Police*, which stood facing the *Palais de Justice*. It wasn't till the following day that those offices would once again be teeming with people in search of passport visas, driving licenses, and permits of every description.

In the courtyard below, cars stood waiting for emergency calls, the men of the flying squad dozing on the seats.

Nothing, however, had happened that night of sufficient importance to justify their being called out. You could see that from the little crosses in Lecoer's notebook. He didn't bother to count them, but he could tell at a glance that there were something like 200 in the drunks' column.

No doubt there'd have been a lot more if it hadn't been that this was a night for indulgence. In most cases the police were able to persuade those who had had too much to go home and keep out of trouble. Those arrested were the ones in whom drink raised the devil, those who smashed windows or molested other people.

Two hundred of that sort—a handful of women among them—were now out of harm's way, sleeping heavily on the wooden benches in the lock-ups.

There'd been five knifings. Two near the Porte d'Italie. Three in the remoter part of Montmartre, not in the Montmartre of the *Moulin Rouge* and the *Lapin Agile*, but in the Zone, beyond where the *Fortifs* used to be, whose population included over 100,000 Arabs, living in huts made of old packing-cases and roofing-felt.

A few children lost in the exodus from the churches. But they were

soon returned to their anxious parents.

"Hallo! Chaillot? How's your veronal case getting on?"

She wasn't dead. Of course not! Few went as far as that. Suicide is all very well as a gesture. Indeed, it can be a very effective one. But there's no need to go and kill yourself!

"Talking of *boudin*," said Mambret, who was smoking an enormous meerschaum pipe, "that reminds me of . . ."

They were never to know what he was reminded of. There were steps in the corridor, then the handle of the door was turned. All three looked round at once, wondering who could be coming to see them at ten past six in the morning.

"*Salut!*" said the man who entered, throwing his hat down on a chair.

"Whatever brings you here, Janvier?"

It was a detective of the *Brigade des Homicides*, who walked straight over to the stove to warm his hands.

"I got pretty bored sitting all by myself, and I thought I might as well come over here. After all, if the killer's going to do his stuff, I'd hear about it quicker here than anywhere."

He, too, had been on duty all night, but round the corner, in the *Police Judiciaire*.

"You don't mind, do you?" he asked, picking up the coffee-pot, "There's a bitter wind blowing."

It had made his ears red.

"I don't suppose we shall hear till eight, probably later," said Lecoer.

For the last fifteen years he had spent his nights in that room, sitting at the switchboard, keeping an eye on the big map with the little lamps. He knew half the police in Paris by name, or, at any rate, those who did night duty. Of many he knew even their private affairs, as, when things were quiet, he would have long chats with them over the telephone to pass the time away.

"Oh, it's you, Dumas. . . . How are things at home?"

But though there were many whose voices were familiar, there were hardly any of them he knew by sight.

Nor was his acquaintance confined to the police. He was on equally familiar terms with many of the hospitals.

"Hallo! . . . Bichat? . . . What about the chap who was brought in half an hour ago? . . . Is he dead yet? . . ."

He was dead, and another little cross went into the notebook. The latter was, in its unpretentious way, quite a mine of information. If you asked Lecoer how many murders in the last twelve months had been done for the sake of mon-

ey, he'd give the answer in a moment—sixty-seven.

"How many murders committed by foreigners?"

"Forty-two."

You could go on like that for hours without being able to trip him up. And yet he trotted out his figures without a trace of swank. It was his hobby: that was all.

For he wasn't obliged to make those crosses. It was his own idea. Like the chats over the telephone lines, they helped to pass the time away, and the result gave him much the same satisfaction that others get from stamp collecting.

He was unmarried. Few knew where he lived or what sort of a life he led outside that room. It was difficult to picture him anywhere else, even to think of him walking along the street like an ordinary person. He turned to Janvier to say:

"For your cases, we generally have to wait till people are up and about. It's when a *concierge* goes up with the post or when a maid takes her mistress' breakfast in to the bedroom that things like that come to light."

He claimed no special merit, in knowing a thing like that. It was just a fact. A bit earlier in summer, of course, and later in winter. On Christmas Day probably later still, as a considerable part of the population hadn't got to bed till two or even later, to say nothing of their having to sleep off a good many glasses of champagne.

Before then still more water would have gone under the bridge, a few more stolen cars, a few belated drunks, a few . . .

"Hallo! . . . Saint-Gervais? . . ."

His Paris was not the one known to the rest of us—the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, the Opera—but one of sombre, massive buildings, with a police-car waiting under the blue lamp and the bicycles of *agents cyclistes* leaning against the wall.

"The Chief is convinced the chap'll have another go tonight," said Janvier. "It's just the night for people of that sort. Seems to excite them."

No name was mentioned, for none was known. Nor could he be described as the man in the fawn raincoat or the man in the gray hat, since no one had ever seen him. For a while the papers had referred to him as Monsieur Dimanche, as his first three murders had been on Sunday, but since then five others had been on weekdays, at the rate of about one a week, though not quite regularly.

"It's because of him you've been on all night, is it?" asked Mambret.

Janvier wasn't the only one. All over Paris extra men were on duty, watching or waiting.

"You'll see," put in Sommer, "when you do get him you'll find he's only a loony."

"Loony or no, he's killed eight

people," sighed Janvier, sipping his coffee. "Look, Lecoeur! There's one of your lamps burning."

"Hallo! . . . Your car's out? . . . What's that? . . . Just a moment. . . ."

They could see Lecoeur hesitate, not knowing in which column to put a cross. There was one for hangings, one for those who jumped out of the window, another for . . .

"Here, listen to this. . . . On the Pont d'Austerlitz a chap climbed up on to the parapet. He had his legs tied together and a cord round his neck with the end made fast to a lamp-post, and, as he threw himself over, he fired a shot into his head!"

"Taking no risks, what. . . . And which column does that one go into?"

"There's one for neurasthenics. We may as well call it that!"

Those who hadn't been to Midnight Mass were now on their way to early service. With hands thrust deep in their pockets and drops on the ends of their noses, they walked bent forward into the cutting wind, which seemed to blow up a fine, icy dust from the pavements. It would soon be time for the children to be waking up, jumping out of bed, and gathering barefoot round lighted Christmas trees.

"But it's not at all sure the fellow's mad. In fact, the experts say that if he was, he'd always do it the same way. If it was a knife,

then it would always be a knife."

"What did he use last time?"

"A hammer."

"And the time before?"

"A dagger."

"What makes you think it's the same chap?"

"First of all, the fact that there've been eight murders in quick succession. You don't get eight new murderers cropping up in Paris all at once."

Belonging to the *Police Judiciaire*, Janvier had, of course, heard the subject discussed at length.

"Besides, there's a sort of family likeness between them all. The victims are invariably solitary people, people who live alone, without any family or friends."

Sommer looked at Lecoeur, whom he could never forgive for not being a family man. Not only had he five children himself, but a sixth was already on the way.

"You'd better look out, Lecoeur! You see the kind of thing it leads to!"

"Then, not one of the crimes has been committed in one of the wealthier districts. . . ."

"Yet he steals, doesn't he?"

"He does, but not much. The little hoards hidden under the mattress—that's his mark. He doesn't break in. In fact, apart from the murder and the money missing, he leaves no trace at all."

Another lamp burning. A stolen car found abandoned in a little side street, near the Place des Ternes.

"All the same, I can't help laughing over the people who had to walk home. . . ."

Another hour or more and they would be relieved, except Lecoeur, who had promised to do the first day shift as well, so that his opposite number could join in a family Christmas party somewhere near Rouen.

It was a thing he often did, so much so that he had come to be regarded as an ever-ready substitute for anybody who wanted a day off.

"I say, Lecoeur. . . . Do you think you could look out for me on Friday?"

At first the request was proffered with a suitable excuse, a sick mother, a funeral, or a first communion, and he was generally rewarded with a bottle of wine. But now it was taken for granted and treated quite casually.

To tell the truth, had it been possible, Lecoeur would have been only too glad to spend his whole life in that room, snatching a few hours' sleep on a camp bed and picnicking as best he could with the aid of the little electric stove. It was a funny thing: although he was as careful as any of the others about his personal appearance, and much more so than Sommer, who always looked a bit tousled, yet there was something a bit drab about him which betrayed the bachelor.

He wore strong glasses which gave him big, globular eyes, and it

came as a surprise to everyone, when he took them off to wipe them with the bit of chamois leather he always carried about, to see the transformation. Without them, his eyes were gentle, rather shy, and inclined to look away quickly when anyone looked his way.

"Hallo! Javel? . . ."

Another lamp. One near the Quai de Javel in the 15th *arrondissement*, a district full of factories.

"*Votre car est sorti?*"

"We don't know yet what it is. Someone's broken the glass of the alarm in the Rue Leblanc."

"Wasn't there a message?"

"No. We've sent our car to investigate. I'll ring you again later."

Scattered here and there all over Paris are red-painted telephone pillars standing by the curb, and you have only to break the glass to be in direct telephone communication with the nearest police-station. Had a passer-by broken the glass accidentally? It looked like it, for a couple of minutes later Javel rang up again.

"Hallo! Central? . . . Our car's just got back. Nobody about. The whole district seems quiet as the grave. All the same, we've sent out a patrol."

How was Lecoeur to classify that one? Unwilling to admit defeat, he put a little cross in the column on the extreme right headed "Miscellaneous."

"Is there any coffee left?" he asked.

"I'll make some more."

The same lamp lit up again, barely ten minutes after the first call.

"Javel? . . . What's it this time?"

"Same again. Another glass broken."

"Nothing said?"

"Not a word. Must be some practical joker. Thinks it funny to keep us on the hop. When we catch him he'll find out whether it's funny or not!"

"Which one was it?"

"The one on the Pont Mirabeau."

"Seems to walk pretty quickly, your practical joker!"

There was indeed quite a good stretch between the two pillars.

So far, nobody was taking it very seriously. False alarms were not uncommon. Some people took advantage of these handy instruments to express their feelings about the police.

"*Mort aux flics!*" was the favorite phrase.

With his feet on a radiator, Janvier was just dozing off, when he heard Lecoer telephoning again. He half-opened his eyes, saw which lamp was on, and muttered sleepily:

"There he is again!"

He was right. A glass broken at the top of the Avenue de Versailles.

"Silly ass!" he grunted, settling down again.

It wouldn't be really light until half-past seven or even eight. Sometimes they could hear a vague sound of church bells, but that was

in another world. The wretched men of the flying squad waiting in the cars below must be half-frozen.

"Talking of *boudin* . . ."

"What *boudin*?" murmured Janvier, whose cheeks were flushed with sleep.

"The one my mother used to . . ."

"Hallo! What? . . . You're not going to tell me someone's smashed the glass of one of your telephone pillars? . . . Really? . . . It must be the same chap. . . . We've already had two reported from the 15th. . . . Yes, they tried to nab him, but couldn't find a soul about. . . . Gets about pretty fast, doesn't he? . . . He crossed the river by the Pont Mirabeau. . . . Seems to be heading in this direction . . . Yes. You may as well have a try. . . ."

Another little cross. By half-past seven, with only half an hour of the night watch to go, there were five crosses in the *Miscellaneous* column.

Mad or sane, the person was a good walker. Perhaps the cold wind and something to do with it. It wasn't the weather for sauntering along.

For a time it had looked as though he was keeping to the right bank of the Seine, then he had sheered off into the wealthy Auteuil district, breaking a glass in the Rue La Fontaine.

"He's only five minutes' walk from the Bois de Boulogne," Le-

coeur had said. "If he once gets there, they'll never pick him up."

But the fellow had turned round and made for the quays again, breaking a glass in the Rue Berton, just round the corner from the Quai de Passy.

The first calls had come from the poorer quarters of Grenelle, but the man had only to cross the river to find himself in entirely different surroundings—quiet, spacious, and deserted streets, where his footfalls must have rung out clearly on the frosty pavements.

Sixth call. Skirting the Place du Trocadéro, he was in the Rue de Longchamp.

"The chap seems to think he's on a paper-chase," remarked Mambret. "Only he uses broken glass instead of paper."

Other calls came in in quick succession. Another stolen car, a revolver-shot in the Rue de Flandres, whose victim swore he didn't know who fired it, though he'd been seen all through the night drinking in company with another man.

"Hallo! Here's Javel again. . . . Hallo! Javel? It can't be your practical joker this time: he must be somewhere near the Champs Elysées by now. . . . Oh, yes. He's still at it. . . . Well, what's your trouble? . . . What? . . . Spell it, will you? . . . Rue Michat. Yes, I've got it. Between the Rue Le-course and the Boulevard Félix Faure. . . . By the viaduct—yes, I know . . . No. 17 . . . Who re-

ported it? . . . The *concierge*? . . . She's just been up, I suppose. . . . Oh, shut up, will you! . . . No, I wasn't speaking to you. It's Sommer here, who can't stop talking about a *boudin* he ate thirty years ago! . . ."

Sommer broke off and listened to the man on the switchboard.

"What were you saying? . . . A shabby, seven-story block of flats. . . . Yes. . . ."

There were plenty of buildings like that in the district, buildings that weren't really old, but of such poor construction that they were already dilapidated. Buildings that as often as not thrust themselves up bleakly in the middle of a bit of wasteland, towering over the little shacks and hovels around them, their blind-walls plastered with advertisements.

"You say she heard someone running downstairs and then a door slam. . . . The door of the house, I suppose. . . . On which floor is the flat? . . . The *entresol*. . . . Which way does it face? . . . Onto an inner courtyard. . . . Just a moment. There's a call coming in from the 8th. That must be our friend of the telephone pillars. . . ."

Lecoeur asked the new caller to wait, then came back to Javel.

"An old woman, you say. . . . Madame Fayet. . . . Worked as charwoman. . . . Deaf? . . . A blunt instrument . . . Is the doc-

tor there? . . . You're sure she's dead? . . . What about her money? I suppose she had some tucked away somewhere. . . . Right. Call me back. . . . Or I'll ring you."

He turned to the detective, who was now sleeping soundly.

"Janvier! Hey! Janvier! . . . This is for you."

"What? What is it?"

"The killer."

"Where?"

"Near the Rue Lecourbe. Here's the address. . . . This time he's done in an old charwoman, a Madame Fayet."

Janvier put on his overcoat, looked round for his hat, and gulped down the remains of the coffee in his cup.

"Who's dealing with it?"

"Gonesse, of the 15th."

"Ring up the *P.J.*, will you, and tell them I've gone there. . . ."

A minute or two later, Lecoeur was able to add another little cross to the six that were already in the column. Someone had smashed the glass of the pillar in the Avenue d'Iéna only one hundred and fifty yards from the Arc de Triomphe.

"Among the broken glass they found a handkerchief flecked with blood. It was a child's handkerchief."

"Has it got initials?"

"No. It's a blue-check handkerchief, rather dirty. The chap must have wrapped it round his knuckles for breaking the glass."

There were steps in the corridor. The day shift coming to take over. They looked very clean and close-shaven and the cold wind had whipped the blood into their cheeks.

"Happy Christmas!"

Sommer closed the tin in which he brought his sandwiches. Mambret knocked out his pipe. Only Lecoeur remained in his seat, since there was no relief for him.

The fat Godin had been the first to arrive, promptly changing his jacket for the gray linen coat in which he always worked, then putting some water on to boil for his grog. All through the winter he suffered from one never-ending cold which he combated, or perhaps nourished, by one hot grog after another.

"Hallo! Yes, I'm still here. I'm doing a shift for Potier who's gone down to his family in Normandy. . . . Yes. I want to hear all about it. . . . Most particularly. . . . Janvier's gone, but I'll pass it on to the *P.J.* An invalid, you say? . . . What invalid?"

One had to be patient on that job, as people always talked about their cases as though everyone else was in the picture.

"A low building behind, right. . . . Not in the Rue Michat, then? . . . I know. The little house with a garden behind some railings. . . . Only I didn't know he was an invalid. . . . Right. . . . He does-

n't sleep much. . . . Saw a young boy climbing up a drain-pipe? . . . How old? . . . He couldn't say? . . . Of course not, in the dark. . . . How did he know it was a boy, then? . . . Listen, ring me up again, will you? . . . Oh, you're going off. . . . Who's relieving you? . . . Jules? . . . Right. Well, ask him to keep me informed. . . ."

"What's going on?" asked Godin.

"An old woman who's been done in. Down by the Rue Le-course."

"Who did it?"

"There's an invalid opposite who says he saw a small boy climbing up a drain-pipe and along the top of a wall."

"You mean to say it was a boy who killed the old woman?"

"We don't know yet. . . ."

No one was very interested. After all, murders were an everyday matter to these people. The lights were still on in the room, as it was still only a bleak, dull daylight that found its way through the frosty window-panes. One of the new watch went and scratched a bit of the frost away. It was instinctive. A childish memory perhaps, like Sommer's *boudin*.

The latter had gone home. So had Mambret. The newcomers settled down to their work, turning over the papers on their desks.

A car stolen from the Square la Bruyère.

Lecoer looked pensively at his seven crosses. Then, with a sigh, he got up and stood gazing at the immense street plan on the wall.

"Brushing up on your Paris?"

"I think I know it pretty well already. Something's just struck me. There's a chap wandering about smashing the glass of telephone pillars. Seven in the last hour and a half. He hasn't been going in a straight line, but zigzagging first this way, then that. . . ."

"Perhaps he doesn't know Paris."

"Or knows it only too well! Not once has he ventured within sight of a police-station. If he'd gone straight, he'd have passed two or three. What's more, he's skirted all the main crossroads, where there'd be likely to be a man on duty."

Lecoer pointed them out.

"The only risk he took was in crossing the Pont Mirabeau, but if he wanted to cross the river he'd have run that risk at any of the bridges."

"I expect he's drunk," said Godin, sipping his rum.

"What I want to know is why he's stopped."

"Perhaps he's got home."

"A man who's down by the Quai de Javel at half-past six in the morning isn't likely to live near the Etoile."

"Seems to interest you a lot!"

"It's got me scared!"

"Go on!"

It was strange to see the worried

expression on Lecoer's face. He was notorious for his calmness and his most dramatic nights were coolly summarized by the little crosses in his notebook.

"Hallo! Javel? . . . Is that Jules? . . . Lecoer speaking. . . . Look here, Jules. Behind the flats in the Rue Michat is the little house where the invalid lives. . . . Well, now, on one side of it is an apartment house, a red brick building with a grocer's shop on the ground floor. You know it? Good. . . . Has anything happened there? . . . Nothing reported. . . . No, we've heard nothing here. . . . All the same . . . I can't explain why, but I think you ought to inquire. . . ."

He was hot all at once. He stubbed out a half-finished cigarette.

"Hallo! Ternes? . . . Any alarms gone off in your neighborhood? Nothing? Only drunks? . . . Is the *patrouille cycliste* out? . . . Just leaving? . . . Ask them to keep their eyes open for a young boy looking tired and very likely bleeding from the right hand. . . . Lost? Not exactly that. . . . I can't explain now . . ."

His eyes went back to the street plan on the wall, in which no light went on for a good ten minutes, and then only for an accidental death in the 18th *arrondissement*, right up at the top of Montmartre, caused by an escape of gas.

Outside, in the cold streets of

Paris, dark figures were hurrying home from the churches.

One of the sharpest impressions that André Lecoer retained of his infancy was one of immobility. His world at that period was a large kitchen in Orléans, on the outskirts of the town. He must have spent his winters there too, but he remembered it best flooded with sunlight, with the door wide open onto a little garden where hens clucked incessantly and rabbits nibbled lettuce leaves behind the wire nettings of their hutches. But, if the door was open, its passage was barred to him by a little gate which his father had made one Sunday for that express purpose.

On week-days, at half-past eight, his father went off on his bicycle to the gasworks at the other end of the town. His mother did the housework, doing just the same things in the same order every-day. Before making the beds, she put the bedclothes over the window-sill for an hour to air.

At ten o'clock a little bell would ring in the street. That was the green-grocer, with his barrow, passing on his daily round. Twice a week at eleven a bearded doctor came to see his little brother, who was constantly ill. André hardly ever saw the latter, as he wasn't allowed into his room.

That was all, or so it seemed in retrospect. He had just time to play a bit and drink his milk, and there

was his father home again for the mid-day meal.

If nothing had happeneed at home, lots had happened to him. He had been to read the meters in any number of houses and chatted with all sorts of people, about whom he would talk during dinner.

As for the afternoon, it slipped away quicker still, perhaps because he was made to sleep during the first part of it.

For his mother, apparently, the time passed just as quickly. Often had he heard her say with a sigh:

"There! I've no sooner washed up after one meal than it's time to start making another!"

Perhaps it wasn't so very different now. Here in the Préfecture de Police the nights seemed long enough at the time, but at the end they seemed to have slipped by in no time, with nothing to show for them except for these columns of the little crosses in his notebook.

A few more lamps lit up. A few more incidents reported, including a collision between a car and a bus in the Rue de Clignancourt, and then once again it was Javel on the line.

It wasn't Jules, however, but Gonesse, the detective who'd been to the scene of the crime. While there, he had received Lecoeur's message suggesting something might have happened in the other house in the Rue Vasco de Gama. He had been to see.

"Is that you, Lecoeur?"

There was a queer note in his voice. Either irritation or suspicion.

"Look here. . . . What made you think of that house. Do you know the old woman, Madame Fayet?"

"I've never seen her, but I know all about her."

What had finally come to pass that Christmas morning was something that André Lecoeur had foreseen and perhaps dreaded for more than ten years. Again and again, as he stared at the huge plan of Paris, with its little lamps, he had said to himself:

"It's only a question of time. Sooner or later, it'll be something that's happened to someone I know."

There'd been many a near miss, an accident in his own street or a crime in a house nearby. But, like thunder, it had approached only to recede once again into the distance.

This time it was a direct hit.

"Have you seen the *concierge*?" he asked. He could imagine the puzzled look on the detective's face as he went on: "Is the boy at home?"

And Gonesse muttered: "Oh? So you know him, too?"

"He's my nephew. Weren't you told his name was Lecoeur?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Never mind about that. Tell me what's happened."

"The boy's not there."

"What about his father?"

"He got home just after seven."

"As usual. He does night work, too."

"The *concierge* heard him go up to his flat—on the third floor at the back of the house."

"I know it."

"He came running down a minute or two later, in a great state. To use her expression, he seemed out of his wits."

"The boy had disappeared?"

"Yes. His father wanted to know if she'd seen him leave the house. She hadn't. Then he asked if a telegram had been delivered."

"Was there a telegram?"

"No. Can you make head or tail of it? . . . Since you're one of the family you might be able to help us. Could you get someone to relieve you and come round here?"

"It wouldn't do any good. Where's Janvier?"

"In the old woman's room. The men of the *Identité Judiciare* have already got to work. The first thing they found were some child's fingerprints on the handle of the door. Come on! Jump into a taxi and come round. . . ."

"No. In any case there's no one to take my place."

That was true enough up to a point. All the same, if he'd really got to work on the telephone he'd have found someone all right. The truth was he didn't want to go and didn't think it would do any good if he did.

"Listen, Gonesse. . . . I've got to find that boy, and I can do it better from here than anywhere. You understand, don't you? . . . Tell Janvier I'm staying here. And tell him old Madame Fayet had plenty of money, probably hidden away somewhere in the room."

A little feverishly he stuck his plug into one socket after another, calling up the various police stations of the 8th *arrondissement*.

"Keep a look-out for a boy of ten, rather poorly dressed. . . . Keep all telephone pillars under observation."

"Do you think it was the boy who did the job?"

Lecoeur didn't bother to answer. The next moment he was through to the teleprinter room, where they also dealt with radio messages.

"Justin? . . . Oh, you're on, are you? . . . Here's something special. . . . Will you send out a call to all cars on patrol anywhere near the Etoile to keep a look-out for . . ."

Once again the description of the boy, François Lecoeur.

"No. I've no idea in which direction he'll be making. All I can tell you is that he seems to keep well clear of police stations, and as far as possible from any place where there's likely to be anyone on traffic duty."

He knew his brother's flat in the Rue Vasco de Gama. Two rather dark rooms and a tiny kitchen. The boy slept there alone, while

his father was at work. From the windows you could see the back of the house in the Rue Michat, across a courtyard generally hung with washing. On some of the window-sills were pots of geraniums, and through the windows, many of which were uncurtained, you could catch glimpses of a miscellaneous assortment of humanity.

As a matter of fact, there, too, the window-panes ought to be covered with frost. He stored that idea up in a corner of his mind. It might be important.

"You think it's a boy who's been smashing the alarm glasses?"

"It was a child's handkerchief they found," said Lecoeur curtly.

He didn't want to be drawn into a discussion. He sat mutely at the switchboard, wondering what to do next.

In the Rue Michat things seemed to be moving fast. The next time he got through it was to learn that a doctor was there as well as an examining magistrate, who had most likely been dragged from his bed.

What help could Lecoeur have given them? But if he wasn't there, he could see the place almost as clearly as those that were, the dismal houses and the grimy viaduct of the Métro which cut right across the landscape.

Nothing but poor people in that neighborhood. The younger generation's one hope was to escape from it. The middle-aged already doubted whether they ever would, while

the old ones had already accepted their fate and tried to make the best of it.

He rang Javel once again.

"Is Gonesse still there?"

"He's writing up his report. Shall I call him?"

"Yes, please. . . . Hallo, Gonesse! . . . Lecoeur speaking. . . . Sorry to bother you, but did you go up to my brother's flat? . . . Had the boy's bed been slept in? . . . It had? Good. That makes it look a bit better. . . . Another thing: were there any parcels there? . . . Yes, parcels, Christmas presents. . . . What? . . . A small square radio. . . . Hadn't been unpacked. . . . Naturally. . . . Anything else? Things to eat? . . . What were they? . . . A chicken, a *boudin*, a Saint-Honoré. . . . I suppose Janvier's not with you? . . . Still on the spot. Right. . . . Has he rung up the *P.J.*? . . . Good. . . ."

He was surprised to see it was already half-past nine. It was no use now expecting anything from the neighborhood of the Etoile. If the boy had gone on walking as he had been earlier, he could be pretty well anywhere by this time.

"Hallo! . . . *Police Judiciaire*? . . . Is Inspector Saillard there?"

He was another whom the murderer had dragged from his fireside. How many people were there whose Christmas was going to be spoiled by it?

"Excuse my troubling you, Mon-

sieur *le Commissaire*. . . . It's about that young boy, François Lecoeur."

"Do you know anything? Is he a relation of yours?"

"He's my brother's son. . . . And it looks as if he may well be the person who's been smashing the glasses of the telephone pillars. Seven of them. I don't know whether they've had time to tell you about that. . . . What I wanted to ask was whether I might put out a general call. . . ."

"Could you nip over to see me?"

"There's no one here to take my place."

"Right. I'll come over myself. Meanwhile you can send out the call."

Lecoeur kept calm though his hand shook slightly as he plugged in once again to the room above.

"Justin? . . . Lecoeur again. . . . *Appel Général*. Yes. It's the same boy. François Lecoeur. Ten and a half. Rather tall for his age. Thin. I don't know what he's wearing, probably a khaki jumper made from American battle-dress. No. No cap. He's always bare-headed, with plenty of hair flopping over his forehead. . . . Perhaps it would be as well to send out a description of his father, too. That's not so easy. . . . You know me, don't you? Well, Olivier Lecoeur is rather like a paler version of me. He has a timid look about him and physically he's not robust. The sort that's never in the mid-

dle of the pavement but always dodging out of other people's way. He walks a bit queerly, owing to a wound he got in the first war. . . . No, I haven't the least idea where they might be going, only I don't think they're together. To my mind, the boy is probably in danger. I can't explain why; it would take too long. . . . Get the descriptions out as quickly as possible, will you? And let me know if there's any response."

By the time Lecoeur had finished telephoning, Inspector Saillard was there, having only had to come round the corner from the Quai des Orfèvres. He was an imposing figure of a man, particularly in his bulky overcoat. With a comprehensive wave of the hand he greeted the three men on watch, then, seizing a chair as though it were a wisp of straw, he swung it round towards him and sat down heavily.

"The boy?" he inquired at last, looking keenly at Lecoeur.

"I can't understand why he's stopped calling us up."

"Calling us up?"

"Attracting our attention, anyway."

"But why should he attract our attention and then not say anything?"

"Supposing he was followed. Or was following someone."

"I see what you men. . . . Look here, Lecoeur, is your brother in financial straits?"

"He's a poor man, yes."

"Is that all?"

"He lost his job three months ago."

"What job?"

"He was linotype operator at *La Presse* in the Rue du Croissant. He was on the night shift. He always did night work. Runs in the family."

"How did he come to lose his job?"

"I suppose he fell out with somebody."

"Is that a failing of his?"

They were interrupted by an incoming call from the 18th to say that a boy selling branches of holly had been picked up in the Rue Lepic. It turned out, however, to be a little Pole who couldn't speak any French.

"You were asking if my brother was in the habit of quarreling with people. I hardly know what to answer. He was never strong. Pretty well all his childhood he was ill on and off. He hardly ever went to school. But he read a great deal all alone in his room."

"Is he married?"

"His wife died two years after they were married, leaving him with a baby ten months old."

"Did he bring it up himself?"

"Entirely. I can see him now bathing the little chap, changing his diapers, and warming the milk for his bottle. . . ."

"That doesn't explain why he quarrels with people."

Admittedly. But it was difficult to put it into words.

"Soured?"

"Not exactly. The thing is . . ."

"What?"

"That he's never lived like other people. Perhaps Olivier isn't really very intelligent. Perhaps, from reading so much, he knows too much about some things and too little about others."

"Do you think him capable of killing the old woman?"

The Inspector puffed at his pipe. They could hear the people in the room above walking about. The two other men fiddled with their papers, pretending not to listen.

"She was his mother-in-law," sighed Lecoeur. "You'd have found it out anyhow."

"They didn't hit it off?"

"She hated him."

"Why?"

"She considered him responsible for her daughter's death. It seems she could have been saved if the operation had been done in time. It wasn't my brother's fault. The people at the hospital refused to take her in. Some silly question of her papers not being in order. All the same, Madame Fayet held to it that Olivier was to blame."

"Did they see each other?"

"Not unless they passed each other in the street, and then they never spoke."

"Did the boy know?"

"That she was his grandmother? I don't think so."

"You think his father never told him?"

Never for more than a second or two did Lecoeur's eyes leave the plan of Paris, but, besides being Christmas, it was the quiet time of the day, and the little lamps lit up rarely. Two or three street accidents, a lady's handbag snatched in the Métro, a suitcase pinched at the Gare de l'Est.

No sign of the boy. It was surprising considering how few people were about. In the poor quarters a few little children played on the pavements with their new toys, but on the whole the day was lived indoors. Nearly all the shops were shuttered and the cafés and the little bars were almost empty.

For a moment the town came to life a bit when the church bells started pealing and families in their Sunday best hurried to High Mass. But soon the streets were quiet again, though haunted here and there by the vague rumble of an organ or a sudden gust of singing.

The thought of churches gave Lecoeur an idea. Might not the boy have tucked himself away in one of them? Would the police think of looking there? He spoke to Inspector Saillard about it and then got through to Justin for the third time.

"The churches. . . . Ask them to have a look at the congregations. . . . They'll be doing the stations,

of course—that's most important. . . ."

He took off his glasses for a moment, showing eyelids that were red, probably from lack of sleep.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. The Inspector's here. Hold on."

He held the receiver to Saillard.

"It's Janvier."

The bitter wind was still driving through the streets. The light was harsh and bleak, though here and there among the closely packed clouds was a yellow streak which could be taken as a faint promise of sunshine to come.

When the Inspector put down the receiver he muttered:

"Dr. Paul says the crime was committed between five and half-past six this morning. The old woman wasn't killed by the first blow. Apparently she was in bed when she heard a noise and got up and faced the intruder. Indeed, it looks as though she tried to defend herself with the only weapon that came to hand—a shoe."

"Have they found the weapon she was killed with?"

"No. It might have been a hammer. More likely a bit of lead piping or something of that sort."

"Have they found her money?"

"Only her purse, with some small change in it and her identity card. Tell me, Lecoeur, did you know she was a money-lender?"

"Yes. I knew."

"And didn't you tell me your brother's been out of work?"

"He has."

"The *concierge* didn't know."

"Neither did the boy. It was for his sake he kept it dark."

The Inspector crossed and uncrossed his legs. He was uncomfortable. He glanced at the other two men who couldn't help hearing everything, then turned with a puzzled look to stare at Lecoeur.

"Do you realize what all this is pointing to?"

"I do."

"You've thought of it yourself?"

"No."

"Because he's your brother?"

"No."

"How long is it that this killer's been at work? Nine weeks, isn't it?"

Without haste, Lecoeur studied the columns of his notebook.

"Yes. Just over nine weeks. The first was on the 20th of October, in the Epinettes district."

"You say your brother didn't tell his son he was out of a job. . . . Do you mean to say he went on leaving home in the evening just as though he was going to work?"

"Yes. He couldn't face the idea of telling him. You see. . . . It's difficult to explain. He was completely wrapped up in the boy. He was all he had to live for. He cooked and scrubbed for him, tucked him up in bed before going off, and woke him up in the morning. . . ."

"That doesn't explain why he couldn't tell him."

"He couldn't bear the thought of appearing to the kid as a failure, a man nobody wanted and who had doors slammed in his face."

"But what did he do with himself all night?"

"Odd jobs. When he could get them. For a fortnight he was employed as night watchman in a factory in Billancourt, but that was only while the regular man was ill. Often he got a few hours work washing down cars in one of the big garages. When that failed he'd sometimes lend a hand at the market, unloading vegetables. When he had one of his bouts. . . ."

"Bouts of what?"

"Asthma. . . . He had them from time to time. . . . Then he'd lie down in a station waiting-room. Once he spent a whole night here, chatting with me. . . ."

"Now, suppose the boy woke up early this morning and saw his father at Madame Fayet's."

"There was frost on the windows."

"There wouldn't be if the window was open. Lots of people sleep with their windows open, even in the coldest weather."

"It wasn't the case with my brother. He was always a chilly person. And he was much too poor to waste warmth."

"As far as his window was concerned, the boy had only to scratch away the frost with his fingernails. When I was a boy . . ."

"Yes. So did I. . . . The thing is

to find out whether the old woman's window was open."

"It was, and the light was switched on."

"I wonder where François can have got to."

"The boy?"

It was surprising, and a little disconcerting, the way he kept all the time reverting to him. The situation was certainly embarrassing, and somehow made all the more so by the calm way in which André Lecoeur gave the Inspector the most damaging details about his brother.

"When he came in this morning," began Saillard again, "he was carrying a number of parcels. You realize . . ."

"It's Christmas."

"Yes. But he'd have needed quite a bit of money to buy a chicken, a cake, and that new radio. Has he borrowed any from you lately?"

"Not for a month. I haven't seen him for a month. I wish I had. I'd have told him that I was getting a radio for François myself. I've got it here. Downstairs, that is, in the cloakroom. I was going to take it straight round as soon as I was relieved."

"Would Madame Fayet have consented to lend him money?"

"It's unlikely. She was a queer lot. She must have had quite enough money to live on, yet she still went out to work, charing from morning to evening. Often she lent money to the people she

worked for. At exorbitant interest, of course. All the neighborhood knew about it, and people always came to her when they needed something to tide them over till the end of the month."

Still embarrassed, the Inspector rose to his feet.

"I'm going to have a look," he said.

"At Madame Fayet's?"

"There and in the Rue Vasco de Gama. If you get any news, let me know, will you?"

"You won't find any telephone there, but I can get a message to you through the Javel police-station."

The Inspector's footsteps had hardly died away before the telephone bell rang. No lamp had lit up on the wall. This was an outside call, coming from the Gare d'Austerlitz.

"Lecoeur? Station police speaking. We've got him."

"Who?"

"The man whose description was circulated. Lecoeur. Same as you. Olivier Lecoeur. No doubt about it, I've seen his identity card."

"Hold on, will you?"

Lecoeur dashed out of the room and down the stairs, just in time to catch the Inspector as he was getting into one of the cars belonging to the *Préfecture*.

"Inspector! . . . The Gare d'Austerlitz is on the 'phone. They've found my brother."

Saillard was a stout man and he went up the stairs puffing and blowing. He took the receiver himself.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. . . . Where was he? . . . What was he doing? . . . What? . . . No. There's no point in your questioning him now. . . . You're sure he didn't know? . . . Right. Go on looking out. . . . It's quite possible. . . . As for him, send him here straight away. . . . At the *Préfecture*, yes. . . ."

He hesitated for a second and glanced at Lecoeur before saying finally:

"Yes. Send someone with him. We can't take any risks."

The Inspector filled his pipe and lit it before explaining, and when he spoke he looked at nobody in particular.

"He was picked up after he'd been wandering about the station for over an hour. He seemed very jumpy. Said he was waiting there to meet his son, from whom he'd received a message."

"Did they tell him about the murder?"

"Yes. He appeared to be staggered by the news and terrified. I asked them to bring him along." Rather diffidently he added: "I asked them to bring him here. Considering your relationship . . . I didn't want you to think . . ."

Lecoeur had been in that room since eleven o'clock the night before. It was rather like his early

years; when he spent his days in his mother's kitchen. Around him was an unchanging world. There were the little lamps, of course, that kept going on and off, but that's what they always did. They were part and parcel of the immutability of the place. Time flowed by without anyone noticing it.

Yet outside Paris was celebrating Christmas. Thousands of people had been to Midnight Mass, thousands more had spent the night roistering, and those who hadn't known where to draw the line had sobered down in the *dépôt* and were now being called upon to explain things they couldn't remember doing.

What had his brother Olivier been doing all through the night? An old woman had been found dead. A boy had started before dawn on a breathless race through the streets, breaking the glass of the telephone pillars as he passed them, having wrapped his hand-kerchief round his fist.

And what was Olivier waiting for at the Gare d'Austerlitz, sometimes in the overheated waiting-rooms, sometimes on the wind-swept platforms, too nervous to settle down in any one place for long?

Less than ten minutes elapsed, just time enough for Godin, whose nose really was running, to make himself another glass of hot grog.

"Can I offer you one, Monsieur le Commissaire?"

"No, thanks."

Looking more embarrassed than ever, Saillard leaned over towards Lecoeur to say in an undertone:

"Would you like us to question him in another room?"

No. Lecoeur wasn't going to leave his post for anything. He wanted to stay there, with his little lamps and his switchboard. Was it that he was thinking more of the boy than of his brother?

Olivier came in with a detective on either side, but they had spared him the handcuffs: He looked dreadful, like a bad photograph faded with age. At once he turned to André.

"Where's François?"

"We don't know. We're hunting for him."

"Where?"

André Lecoeur pointed to his plan of Paris and his switchboard of a thousand lines.

"Everywhere."

The two detectives had already been sent away.

"Sit down," said the Inspector. "I believe you've been told of Madame Fayet's death."

Olivier didn't wear spectacles, but he had the same pale and rather fugitive eyes as his brother had when he took his glasses off. He glanced at the Inspector, by whom he didn't seem the least overawed, then turned back to André.

"He left a note for me," he said, delving into one of the pockets of

his grubby mackintosh. "Here. See if you can understand."

He held out a bit of paper torn out of a schoolboy's exercise book. The writing wasn't any too good. It didn't look as though François was the best of pupils. He had used an indelible pencil, wetting the end in his mouth, so that his lips were very likely stained with it.

*Uncle Gédéon arrives this morning Gare d'Austerlitz. Come as soon as you can and meet us there. Love. Bib.*

Without a word, André Lecoeur passed it on to the Inspector, who turned it over and over with his thick fingers.

"What's Bib stand for?"

"It's his nickname. A baby name. I never use it when other people are about. It comes from *biberon*. . . . When I used to give him his bottle . . ."

He spoke in a toneless voice. He seemed to be in a fog and was probably only dimly conscious of where he was.

"Who's Uncle Gédéon?"

"There isn't any such person."

Did he realize he was talking to the head of the *Brigade des Homicides*, who was at the moment investigating a murder?

It was his brother who came to the rescue, explaining:

"As a matter of fact, we had an Uncle Gédéon, but he's been dead for some years. He was one of my mother's brothers who emigrated to America as a young man."

Olivier looked at his brother as much as to say: "What's the point of going into that?"

"We got into the habit, in the family, of speaking—jocularly, of course—of our rich American uncle and of the fortune he'd leave us one day."

"Was he rich?"

"We didn't know. We never heard from him except for a postcard once a year, signed Gédéon. Wishing us a happy New Year."

"He died?"

"When François was four."

"Really, André. . . . Do you think it's any use. . . ."

"Let me go on. The Inspector wants to know everything. . . . My brother carried on the family tradition, talking to his son about our Uncle Gédéon, who had become by now quite a legendary figure. He provided a theme for bedtime stories, and all sorts of adventures were attributed to him. Naturally he was fabulously rich, and when one day he came back to France . . . ."

"I understand. . . . He died out there?"

"In a hospital in Cleveland. It was then we found out he had been really a porter in a restaurant. It would have been too cruel to tell the boy that, so the legend went on."

"Did he believe in it?"

It was Olivier who answered: "My brother thought he didn't, that he'd guessed the 'truth' but

wasn't going to spoil the game. But I always maintained the contrary, and I'm still practically certain he took it all in. He was like that. Long after his schoolfellows had stopped believing in Father Christmas, he still went on."

Talking about his son brought him back to life, transfigured him.

"But as for this note he left, I don't know what to make of it. I asked the *concierge* if a telegram had come. For a moment I thought André might have played us a practical joke, but I soon dismissed the idea. It isn't much of a joke to get a boy dashing off to a station on a freezing night. Naturally I dashed off to the Gare d'Austerlitz as fast as I could. There I hunted high and low, then wandered about, waiting anxiously for him to turn up. . . . André, you're sure he hasn't been . . . ."

He looked at the street plan on the wall and at the switchboard. He knew very well that every accident was reported.

"He hasn't been run over," said André. "At about eight o'clock he was near the Etoile, but we've completely lost track of him since then."

"Near the Etoile? How do you know?"

"It's rather a long story, but it boils down to this, that a whole series of alarms were set off by someone smashing the glass. They followed a circuitous route from your place to the Arc de Triomphe.

At the foot of the last one they found a blue-check handkerchief, a boy's handkerchief, among the broken glass."

"He has handkerchiefs like that."

"From eight o'clock onwards, not a sign of him."

"Then I'd better get back to the station. He's certain to go there, if he told me to meet him there."

He was surprised at the sudden silence with which his last words were greeted. He looked from one to the other, perplexed, then anxious.

"What is it?"

His brother looked down at the floor. Inspector Saillard cleared his throat, hesitated, then asked:

"Did you go to see your mother-in-law last night?"

Perhaps, as his brother had suggested, Olivier was rather lacking in intelligence. It took a long time for the words to sink in. You could follow their progress in his features.

He had been gazing rather blankly at the Inspector. Suddenly he swung around on his brother, his cheeks red, his eyes flashing.

"André. You dare to suggest that I . . ."

Without the slightest transition, his indignation faded away. He leaned forward in his chair, took his head in his two hands, and burst into a fit of raucous weeping.

Ill at ease, Inspector Saillard looked at André Lecoeur, sur-

prised at the latter's calmness, and a little shocked, perhaps, by what he may well have taken for heartlessness. Perhaps Saillard had never had a brother of his own. André had known his since childhood. It wasn't the first time he had seen Olivier break down. Not by any means. And this time he was almost pleased, as it might have been a great deal worse. What he had dreaded was the moment of indignation, and he was relieved that it had passed so quickly. Had he continued on that tack, he'd have ended by putting everyone's back up, which would have done him no good at all.

Wasn't that how he'd lost one job after another? For weeks, for months, he would go meekly about his work, toeing the line and swallowing what he felt to be humiliations, till all at once he could hold no more, and for some trifle, a chance word, a smile, a harmless contradiction, he would flare up unexpectedly and make a nuisance of himself to everybody.

"What do we do now?" the Inspector's eyes were asking.

André Lecoeur's eyes answered: "Wait."

It didn't last very long. The emotional crisis waned, started again, then petered out altogether. Olivier shot a sulky look at the Inspector, then hid his face again.

Finally, with an air of bitter resignation, he sat up, and with even a touch of pride, said:

"Fire away. I'll answer."

"At what time last night did you go to Madame Fayet's. . . . Wait a moment. First of all, when did you leave your flat?"

"At eight o'clock, as usual, after François was in bed."

"Nothing exceptional happened?"

"No. We'd had supper together. Then he'd helped me to wash up."

"Did you talk about Christmas?"

"Yes. I told him he'd be getting a surprise."

"The table radio. Was he expecting one?"

"He'd been longing for one for some time. You see, he doesn't play with the other boys in the street. Practically all his free time he spends at home."

"Did it ever occur to you that the boy might know you'd lost your job at the *Presse*? Did he ever ring you up there?"

"Never. When I'm at work, he's asleep."

"Could anyone have told him?"

"No one knew. Not in the neighborhood, that is."

"Is he observant?"

"Very. He notices everything."

"You saw him safely in bed, and then you went off. . . . Do you take anything with you—anything to eat, I mean?"

The Inspector suddenly thought of that, seeing Godin produce a ham sandwich. Olivier looked blankly at his empty hands.

"My tin."

"The tin in which you took your sandwiches?"

"Yes. I had it with me when I left. I'm sure of that. I can't think where I could have left it, unless it was at . . ."

"At Madame Fayet's?"

"Yes."

"Just a moment. . . . Lecoeur, get me Javel on the 'phone, will you? . . . Hallo! . . . Who's speaking? . . . Is Janvier there? . . . Good. Ask him to speak to me. . . . Hallo! Is that you, Janvier? . . . Have you come across a tin box containing some sandwiches. . . . Nothing of the sort. Really? . . . All the same, I'd like you to make sure. . . . Ring me back. . . . It's important. . . ."

And, turning again to Olivier: "Was Françoise actually sleeping when you left?"

"No. But he'd snuggled down in bed and soon would be. . . . Outside, I wandered about for a bit. I walked down to the Seine and waited on the embankment."

"Waited? What for?"

"For François to be fast asleep. From his room you can see Madame Fayet's windows."

"So you'd made up your mind to go and see her."

"It was the only way. I hadn't a bean left."

"What about your brother?"

Olivier and André looked at each other.

"He'd already given me so much. I felt I couldn't ask him."

"You rang at the house door, I suppose. . . . At what time?"

"A little after nine. The *concierge* saw me. I made no attempt to hide—except from François."

"Had your mother-in-law gone to bed?"

"No. She was fully dressed, when she opened her door. She said: 'Oh, it's you, you wretch!'"

"After that beginning did you still think she'd lend you money?"

"I was sure of it."

"Why?"

"It was her business. Perhaps also for the pleasure of squeezing me if I didn't pay her back. She lent me ten thousand francs, but made me sign an I.O.U. for twenty thousand."

"How soon had you to pay her back?"

"In a fortnight's time."

"How could you hope to?"

"I don't know. Somehow. The thing that mattered was for the boy to have a good Christmas."

André Lecoer was tempted to butt in to explain to the puzzled Inspector: "You see! He's always been like that."

"Did you get the money easily?"

"Oh, no. We were at it for a long time."

"How long?"

"Half an hour, I daresay, and during most of that time she was calling me names; telling me I was no good to anyone and had ruined her daughter's life before I finally killed her! I didn't answer her

back. I wanted the money too badly."

"You didn't threaten her?"  
Olivier reddened.

"Not exactly. I said if she didn't let me have it I'd kill myself."

"Would you have done it?"

"I don't think so. At least, I don't know. I was fed up, worn out."

"And when you got the money?"

"I walked to the nearest Métro station, Lourmel, and took the underground to Palais Royal. There I went into the Grands Magasins du Louvre. The place was crowded, with queues at many of the counters."

"What time was it?"

"It was after eleven before I left the place. I was in no hurry. I had a good look round. I stood a long time watching a toy electric train."

André couldn't help smiling at the Inspector:

"You didn't miss your sandwich tin?"

"No. I was thinking about François and his present."

"And with money in your pocket you banished all your cares!"

The Inspector hadn't known Olivier Lecoer since childhood, but he had sized him up all right. He had hit the nail on the head. When things were black, Olivier would go about with drooping shoulders and a hangdog air, but no sooner had he a thousand-franc note in his pocket than he'd feel on top of the world.

"To come back to Madame Fayet, you say you gave her a receipt. . . . What did she do with it?"

"She slipped it into an old wallet she always carried about with her in a pocket somewhere under her skirt."

"So you knew about the wallet?"

"Yes. Everybody did."

The Inspector turned towards André:

"It hasn't been found!"

Then to Olivier: "You bought some things. In the Louvre?"

"No. I bought the little radio in the Rue Montmartre."

"In which shop?"

"I don't know the name. It's next door to a shoe shop."

"And the other things?"

"A little further on."

"What time was it when you'd finished shopping?"

"Close on midnight. People were coming out of the theatres and movies and crowding into the restaurants. Some of them were rather noisy."

His brother at that time was already here at his switchboard.

"What did you do during the rest of the night?"

"At the corner of the Boulevard des Italiens there's a movie that stays open all night. . . ."

"You'd been there before?"

Avoiding his brother's eye, he answered rather sheepishly.

Two or three times. After all, it costs no more than going into a

café and you can stay there as long as you like it. It's nice and warm. Some people go there regularly to sleep."

"When was it you decided to go to the movies?"

"As soon as I left Madame Fayet's."

André Lecoeur was tempted to intervene once again to say to the Inspector:

"You see, these people who are down and out are not so utterly miserable after all. If they were, they'd never stick it out. They've got a world of their own, in odd corners of which they can take refuge and even amuse themselves."

It was all so like Olivier! With a few notes in his pocket—and Heaven only knew how he was ever going to pay them back—with a few notes in his pocket, his trials were forgotten. He had only one thought: to give his boy a good Christmas. With that secured, he was ready to stand himself a little treat.

So while other families were gathered at table or knelt at Midnight Mass, Olivier went to the movies all by himself. It was the best he could do.

"When did you leave the movie?"

"A little before six."

"What was the film?"

"*Coeurs Ardents*. With a documentary on Eskimos."

"How many times did you see the program?"

"Twice right through, except for the news, which was just coming on again when I left."

André Lecoeur knew that all this was going to be verified, if only as a matter of routine. It wasn't necessary, however. Diving into his pockets, Olivier produced the torn-off half of a movie ticket, then another ticket, a pink one.

"Look at that. It's the Métro ticket I had coming home."

It bore the name of the station Opéra, together with the date and the time.

Olivier had been telling the truth. He couldn't have been in Madame Fayet's flat any time between five and six-thirty.

There was a little spark of triumph in his eye, mixed with a touch of disdain. He seemed to be saying to them all, including his brother André:

"Because I'm poor and unlucky I come under suspicion. I know—that's the way things are. I don't blame you."

And, funnily enough, it seemed as though all at once the room had grown colder. That was probably because, with Olivier Lecoeur cleared of suspicion, everyone's thoughts reverted to the child. As though moved by one impulse, all eyes turned instinctively towards the huge plan on the wall.

Some time had elapsed since any of the lamps had lit up. Certainly it was a quiet morning. On any ordinary day there would be a street ac-

ident coming in every few minutes, particularly old women knocked down in the crowded thoroughfares of Montmartre and other overpopulated quarters.

Today the streets were almost empty; emptier than in August, when half Paris is away on holiday.

Half-past eleven. For three and a half hours there'd been no sign of François Lecoeur.

"Hallo! . . . Yes, Saillard speaking. . . . Is that Janvier? . . . You say you couldn't find a tin anywhere? . . . Except in her kitchen, of course. . . . Now, look here. . . . Was it you who went through the old girl's clothes? . . . Oh, Gonesse had already done it. . . . There should have been an old wallet in a pocket under her skirt. . . . You're sure there wasn't anything of that sort? . . . That's what Gonesse told you, is it? . . . What's that about the *concierge*? She saw someone go up a little after nine last night. . . . I know. I know who it was. . . . There were people coming in and out of the best part of the night? . . . Of course. . . . I'd like you to go back to the house in the Rue Vasco de Gama. See what you can find out about the comings and goings there, particularly on the third floor: . . . Yes. I'll still be here."

He turned back to the boy's father, who was now sitting humbly in his chair, looking as intimidated as a patient in a doctor's waiting-room.

"You understand why I asked that, don't you? . . . Does François often wake up in the course of the night?"

"He's been known to get up in his sleep."

"Does he walk about?"

"No. Generally he doesn't even get right out of bed—just sits up and calls out. It's always the same thing. He thinks the house is on fire. His eyes are open, but I don't think he sees anything. Then, little by little, he calms down and with a deep sigh lies down again. The next day he doesn't remember a thing."

"Is he always asleep when you get back in the morning?"

"Not always. But if he isn't he always pretends to be, so that I can wake him up as usual with a hug."

"The people in the house were probably making more noise than usual last night. Who have you got in the next flat?"

"A Czech who works at Renault's."

"Is he married?"

"I really don't know. There are so many people in the house and they change so often we don't know much about them. All I can tell you is that on Sundays other Czechs come there and they sing a lot of their own songs."

"Janvier will tell us whether there was a party there last night. If there was, they may well have awakened the boy. Besides, children are apt to sleep more lightly

when they're excited about a present they're expecting. If he got out of bed, he might easily have looked out of the window, in which case he might have seen you at Madame Fayet's. He didn't know she was his grandmother, did he?"

"No. He didn't like her. He sometimes passed her in the street and he used to say she smelled like a squashed bug."

The boy would probably know what he was talking about. A house like his was no doubt infested with vermin.

"He'd have been surprised to see you with her?"

"Certainly."

"Did he know she lent money?"

"Everyone knew."

"Would there be anybody working at the *Presse* on a day like this?"

"There's always somebody there."

The Inspector asked André to ring them up.

"See if anyone's ever been round to ask for your brother."

Olivier looked uncomfortable, but when his brother reached for the telephone directory, he gave him the number. Both he and the Inspector stared at André while he got through.

"It's very important, Mademoiselle. It may even be a matter of life and death. . . . Yes, please. . . . See if you can find out. Ask everybody who's in the building now. . . . What? . . . Yes, I know

it's Christmas Day . . . It's Christmas Day here, too, but we have to carry on just the same!"

Between his teeth he muttered: "Silly little bitch!"

He could hear the linotypes clicking as he held the line, waiting for her answer.

"Yes. . . . What? . . . Three weeks ago. . . . A young boy . . ."

Olivier went pale in the face. His eyes dropped, and during the rest of the conversation he stared obstinately at his hands.

"He didn't telephone? . . . Came round himself. . . . At what time? . . . On a Thursday, you say. . . . What did he want? . . . Asked if Olivier Lecoeur worked there? . . . What? . . . What was he told?"

Looking up, Olivier saw a flush spread over his brother's face before he banged down the receiver.

"François went there one Thursday afternoon. He must have suspected something. . . . They told him you hadn't been working there for some time."

There was no point in repeating what he had heard. What they'd said to the boy was:

"We chucked the old fool out weeks ago."

Perhaps not out of cruelty. They may not have thought it was the man's son they were speaking to.

"Do you begin to understand, Olivier?"

Did he realize that the situation

was the reverse of what he had imagined? He had been going off at night, armed with his little box of sandwiches, keeping up an elaborate pretense. And in the end he had been the one to be taken in!

The boy had found him out. And wasn't it only fair to suppose that he had seen through the Uncle Gédéon story too?

He hadn't said a word. He had simply fallen in with the game.

No one dared say anything, for fear of saying too much, for fear of evoking images that would be heartrending.

A father and a son each lying to avoid hurting the other. . . .

They had to look at it through the eyes of a child, with all childhood's tragic earnestness. His father kisses him good night and goes off to the job that doesn't really exist, saying:

"Sleep well. . . . There'll be a surprise for you in the morning. . . ."

A radio. It could only be that. And didn't he know that his father's pockets were empty? Did he try to go to sleep? Or did he get up as soon as his father had gone, to sit miserably staring out of the window obsessed by one thought?

*His father had no money—yet was going to buy him a radio!*

To the accompaniment, in all probability, of a full-throated Czech choir singing their national songs on the other side of the thin wall!

The Inspector sighed and knocked out his pipe on his heel.

"It looks as though he saw you at Madame Fayet's."

Olivier nodded.

'We'll check up on this, but it seems likely that, looking down from his window, he wouldn't see very far into the room."

"That's quite right."

"Could he have seen you leave the room?"

"No. The door's on the opposite side from the window."

"Do you remember going near the window?"

"At one time I was sitting on the window-sill."

"Was the window open then? We know it was later."

"It was open a few inches. I'm sure of that, because I moved away from it, as I felt an icy draught on my back. She lived with us for a while, just after our marriage, and I know she couldn't bear not to have her window open all the year round. You see, she'd been brought up in the country."

"So there'd be no frost on the panes. He'd certainly have seen you if he was looking."

A call. Lecoeur thrust his contact plug into one of the sockets.

"Yes. . . . What's that? . . . A boy? . . ."

The other two held their breath.

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . . What? . . . Yes. Send out the *agents cyclistes*. Comb the whole neighborhood. I'll see about the station. . . . How

long ago was it? . . . Half an hour? . . . Couldn't he have let us know sooner? . . ."

Without losing time over explanations, Lecoeur plugged in to the Gare du Nord.

"Hallol . . . Gare du Nord! Who's speaking? . . . Ah, Lambert. . . . Listen, this is urgent. Have the station searched from end to end. Ask everybody if they've seen a boy of ten wandering about. . . . What? . . . Alone?

. . . He may be. . . . Or he may be accompanied. We don't know. . . . Let me know what you find out. . . . Yes, of course. Grab him at once if you set eyes on him. . . ."

"Did you say accompanied?" asked Olivier anxiously

"Why not? It's possible. Anything's possible. . . . Of course, it may not be him. If it is, we're half an hour late. It was a small grocer in the Rue de Maubeuge whose shop-front is open onto the street. . . . He saw a boy snatch a couple of oranges and make off. . . . He didn't run after him. Only later, when a policeman passed, he thought he might as well mention it. . . ."

"Had your son any money?" asked the Inspector.

"Not a sou."

"Hasn't he got a money-box?"

"Yes. But I borrowed what was in it two days ago, saying that I didn't want to change a bank-note."

A pathetic little confession, but

what did things like that matter now?

"Don't you think it would be better if I went to the Gare du Nord myself?"

"I doubt if it would help, and we may need you here."

They were almost prisoners in that room. With its direct links with every nerve-centre of Paris, that was the place where any news would first arrive. Even in his room in the *Police Judiciaire*, the Inspector would be less well placed. He had thought of going back there, but now at last took off his overcoat, deciding to see the job through where he was.

"If he had no money, he couldn't take a bus or the Métro. Nor could he go into a café or use a public telephone. He probably hasn't had anything to eat since his supper last night."

"But what can he be doing?" exclaimed Olivier, becoming more and more nervous. "And why should he have sent me to the Gare d'Austerlitz?"

"Perhaps to help you get away," grunted Saillard.

"Get away? Me?"

"Listen. . . . The boy knows you're down and out. Yet you're going to buy him a little radio. . . . I'm not reproaching you. I'm just looking at the facts. He leans on the window-sill and sees you with the old woman he knows to be a money-lender. What does he conclude?"

"I see. . . ."

"That you've gone to her to borrow money. He may be touched by it, he may be saddened—we don't know. . . . He goes back to bed and to sleep."

"You think so?"

"I'm pretty sure of it. Anyhow, we've no reason to think he left the house then."

"No. Of course not."

"Let's say he goes back to sleep, then. . . . But he wakes up early, as children mostly do on Christmas Day. . . . And the first thing he notices is the frost on the window. The first frost this winter, don't forget that. He wants to look at it, to touch it . . ."

A faint smile flickered across André Lecoeur's face. This massive Inspector hadn't forgotten what it was like to be a boy.

"He scratches a bit of it away with his nails. . . . It won't be difficult to get confirmation, for once the frost is tampered with it can't form again in quite the same pattern. . . . What does he notice then? . . . That in the buildings opposite one window is lit up, and one only—the window of the room in which a few hours before he had seen his father. It's guesswork, of course, but I don't mind betting he saw the body, or part of it. If he'd merely seen a foot it would have been enough to startle him."

"You mean to say . . ." began Olivier, wide-eyed.

"That he thought you'd killed her. As I did myself—for a moment. And very likely not her only. Just think for a minute. . . . The man who's been committing all these murders is a man, like you, who wanders about at night. His victims live in the poorer quarters of Paris, like Madame Fayet in the Rue Michat. Does the boy know anything of how you've been spending your nights since you lost your job? No. All that he had to go on is that he has seen you in the murdered woman's room. Would it be surprising if his imagination got to work?"

"You said just now that you sat on the window-sill. Might it be there that you put down your box of sandwiches?"

"Now I come to think of it. . . . Yes. . . . I'm practically sure."

"Then he saw it. . . . And he's quite old enough to know what the police would think when they saw it lying there. . . . Is your name on it?"

"Yes. Scratched on the lid."

"You see! He thought you'd be coming home as usual between seven and eight. The thing was to get you as quickly as possible out of the danger zone."

"You mean. . . . By writing me that note?"

"Yes. He didn't know what to say. He couldn't refer to the murder without compromising you. Then he thought of Uncle Gédéon. Whether he believed in his ex-

istence or not doesn't matter. He knew you'd go to the Gare d'Austerlitz."

"But he's not yet eleven!"

"Boys of that age know a lot more than you think. Doesn't he read detective stories?"

"Yes."

"Of course, he does. They all do. If they don't read them, they get them on the radio. Perhaps that's why he wanted a set of his own so badly."

"It's true."

"He couldn't stay in the flat to wait for you, for he had something more important to do. He had to get hold of that box. . . . I suppose he knew the courtyard well. . . . He'd played there, hadn't he?"

"At one time, yes. . . . With the *concierge's* little girl."

"So he'd know about the rain-water pipes, may even have climbed up them for sport."

"Very well," said Olivier, suddenly calm, "let's say he gets into the room and takes the box. He wouldn't need to climb down the way he'd come. He could simply walk out of the flat and out of the house. You can open the house door from inside without knocking up the *concierge*. . . . You say it was about six o'clock, don't you?"

"I see what you're driving at," grunted the Inspector. "Even at a leisurely pace it would hardly have taken him two hours to walk to

the Gare d'Austerlitz. Yet he wasn't there. . . ."

Leaving them to thrash it out, André Lecoeur was busy telephoning.

"No news yet?"

And the man at the Gare du Nord answered:

"Nothing so far. We've pounced on any number of boys, but none of them was François Lecoeur."

Admittedly any street boy could have pinched a couple of oranges and taken to his heels. The same couldn't be said for the broken glass of the telephone pillars, however. André Lecoeur looked once again at the column with the seven crosses, as though some clue might suddenly emerge from them. He had never thought himself much cleverer than his brother. Where he scored was in patience and perseverance.

"If the box of sandwiches is ever found it'll be at the bottom of the Seine near the Pont Mirabeau," he said.

Steps in the corridor. On an ordinary day they would not have been noticed, but in the stillness of a Christmas morning everyone listened.

It was an *agent cycliste*, who produced a bloodstained blue-check handkerchief, the one that had been found among the glass splinters at the seventh telephone pillar.

"That's his, all right," said the boy's father.

"He must have been followed,"

said the Inspector. "If he'd had time, he wouldn't merely have broken the glass. He'd have said something."

"Who by?" asked Olivier, who was the only one not to understand. "Who'd want to follow him? And why should he call the police?"

They hesitated to put him wise. In the end it was his brother who explained:

"When he went to the old woman's he thought you were the murderer. When he came away he knew you weren't. He knew . . ."

"Knew what?"

"He knew who was. Do you understand now? He found out something, though we don't know what. He wants to tell us about it, but someone's stopping him."

"You mean?"

"I mean that François is after the murderer or the murderer after him. One is following, one is followed—we don't know which. By the way, Inspector, is there a reward offered?"

"A handsome reward was offered after the third murder and it was doubled last week. It's been in all the papers."

"Then my guess," said André Lecoeur, "is that it's the kid who's doing the following. Only in that case . . ."

It was twelve o'clock, four hours since they'd lost track of him. Unless it was he who had snaffled the oranges in the Rue Maubeuge. . . .

Might not this be his great moment? André Lecoeur had read somewhere that even to the dullest and most uneventful lives such a moment comes sooner or later.

He had never had a particularly high opinion of himself or of his abilities. When people asked him why he'd chosen so dreary and monotonous a job rather than one in, say, the *Brigade des Homicides*, he would answer:

"I suppose I'm lazy."

Sometimes he would add:

"I'm scared of being knocked about."

As a matter of fact, he was neither lazy nor a coward. If he lacked anything it was brains.

He knew it. All he had learned at school had cost him a great effort. The police exams, that others took so easily in their stride, he had only passed by dint of perseverance.

Was it a consciousness of his own shortcomings that had kept him single? Possibly. It seemed to him that the sort of woman he would want to marry would be his superior, and he didn't relish the idea of playing second fiddle in the home.

But he wasn't thinking of all this now. Indeed, if this was his moment of greatness, it was stealing upon him unawares.

Another team arrived, those of the second day-shift, looking very fresh and well-groomed in their Sunday clothes. They had been

celebrating Christmas in their families, and they brought in with them, as it were, a whiff of good viands and liquers.

Old Bedeau had taken his place at the switchboard, but Lecoeur made no move to go.

"I'll stay on a bit," he said simply.

Inspector Saillard had gone for a quick lunch at the Brasserie Dauphine, just round the corner, leaving strict injunctions that he was to be fetched at once if anything happened. Janvier was back at the Quai des Orfèvres, writing up his report.

If Lecoeur was tired, he didn't notice it. He certainly wasn't sleepy and couldn't bear the thought of going home to bed. He had plenty of stamina. Once, when there were riots in the Place de la Concorde, he had done thirty-six hours non-stop, and on another occasion, during a general strike, they had all camped in the room for four days and nights.

His brother showed the strain more. He was getting jumpy again.

"I'm going," he announced suddenly.

"Where to?"

"To find Bib."

"Where?"

"I don't know exactly. . . . I'll start round the Gare du Nord."

"How do you know it was Bib who stole the oranges? He may be

at the other end of Paris. We might get news at any minute. You'd better stay."

"I can't stand this waiting."

He was nevertheless persuaded to. He was given a chair in a corner. He refused to lie down. His eyes were red with anxiety and fatigue. He sat fidgeting, looking rather as, when a boy, he had been put in the corner.

With more self-control, André forced himself to take some rest. Next to the big room was a little one with a wash-basin, where they hung their coats and which was provided with a couple of camp beds on which the *nuiteux* could lie down during a quiet hour.

He shut his eyes, but only for a moment. Then his hand felt for the little notebook which never left him, and lying on his back he began to turn over the pages.

There were nothing but crosses, columns and columns of tiny little crosses which, month after month, year after year he had accumulated, Heaven knows why. Just to satisfy something inside him. After all, other people keep a diary, or the most meticulous household accounts even when they don't need to economize at all.

Those crosses told the story of the night life of Paris.

"Some coffee, Lecoeur?"

"Thanks."

Feeling rather out of touch where he was, he dragged his camp bed into the big room, plac-

ing it in a position from which he could see the wall-plan. There he sipped his coffee, after which he stretched himself out again, sometimes studying his notebook, sometimes lying with his eyes shut. Now and again he stole a glance at his brother, who sat hunched in his chair, with drooping shoulders, the twitching of his long, white fingers being the only sign of the torture he was enduring.

There were hundreds of men now, not only in Paris but in the suburbs, keeping their eyes skinned for the boy whose description had been circulated. Sometimes false hopes were raised, only to be dashed when the exact particulars were given.

Lecoeur shut his eyes again, but opened them suddenly next moment, as though he had actually dozed off. He glanced at the clock, then looked round for the Inspector.

"Hasn't Saillard got back yet?" he asked, getting to his feet.

"I expected he's looked in at the Quai des Orfèvres."

Olivier stared at his brother, surprised to see him pacing up and down the room. The latter was so absorbed in his thoughts that he hardly noticed that the sun had broken through the clouds, bathing Paris on that Christmas afternoon in a glow of light more like that of spring.

While thinking, he listened, and it wasn't long before he heard In-

spector Saillard's heavy tread outside.

"You'd better go and get some sandwiches," he said to his brother. "Get some for me, too."

"What kind?"

"Ham. Anything. Whatever you find."

Olivier went out, after a parting glance at the map, relieved, in spite of his anxiety, to be doing something.

The men of the afternoon shift knew little of what was afoot, except that the killer had done another job the previous night, and that there was a general hunt for a small boy. For them, the case couldn't have the flavor it had for those who were involved. At the switchboard, Bedeau was doing a crossword with his earphones on his head, breaking off from time to time for the classic:

"Hallo! Austerlitz. . . . Your car's out."

A body fished out of the Seine. You couldn't have a Christmas without that!

"Could I have a word with you, Inspector?"

The camp bed was back in the cloakroom. It was there that Le-coeur led the chief of the homicide squad.

"I hope you won't mind my butting in. . . . I know it isn't for me to make suggestions. . . . But, about the killer. . . ."

He had his little notebook in his hand. He must have known its

entire contents almost by heart.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking since this morning, and . . ."

A little while ago, while he was lying down, it had seemed so clear, but now that he had to explain things, it was difficult to put them in logical order.

"It's like this. . . . First of all, I noticed that all the murders were committed after two in the morning, most of them after three. . . ."

He could see by the look on the Inspector's face that he hadn't exactly scored a hit, and he hurried on:

"I've been looking up the times of other murders over the past three years. They were nearly always between ten in the evening and two in the morning."

Neither did that observation seem to make much impression. Why not take the bull by the horns and say straight out what was on his mind?

"Just now, looking at my brother, it occurred to me that the man you're looking for might be a man like him. As a matter of fact I, too, for a moment wondered whether it wasn't him. . . . Wait a moment. . . ."

That was better. The look of polite boredom had gone from Saillard's face.

"If I'd had more experience in this sort of work I'd be able to explain myself better. . . . But you'll see in a moment. . . . A man who's killed eight people one after

the other is, if not a madman, at any rate a man who's been thrown off his balance. He might have had a sudden shock. Take my brother, for instance. When he lost his job it upset him so much that he preferred to live in a tissue of lies rather than let his son . . ."

No. Put into words it all sounded very clumsy.

"When a man suddenly loses everything he has in life . . ."

"He doesn't necessarily go mad."

"I'm not saying he's actually mad. But imagine a person so full of resentment that he considers himself justified in revenging himself on his fellow-men. . . . I don't need to point out to you, Inspector, that other murderers always kill in much the same way. This one has used a hammer, a knife, a spanner, and one woman he strangled. . . . And he's never been seen, never left a clue. Wherever he lives in Paris, he must have walked miles and miles at night when there was no transport available, sometimes, when the alarm had been given, with the police on the look-out, questioning everybody they found in the streets. How is it he avoided them?"

He was certain he was on the right track. If only Saillard would hear him out. . . .

The Inspector sat on one of the camp beds. The cloakroom was small, and as Lecoer paced nervously up and down he could do no more than three paces each way.

"This morning, for instance, assuming he was with the boy, he went halfway across Paris, keeping out of sight of every police station and every traffic point where there'd be a man on duty."

"You mean he knows the 15th and 16th *arrondissements* by heart?"

"And not those only. At least two others; the 12th and the 20th, as he showed on previous occasions. . . . He didn't choose his victims haphazardly. He knew they lived alone and could be done in without any great risk."

What a nuisance! There was his brother, saying: "Here are the sandwiches, André."

"Thanks. Go ahead, will you? . . . Don't wait for me. I'll be with you in a moment."

He bundled Olivier back into his corner and returned to the cloakroom. He didn't want him to hear.

"If he's used a different weapon each time, it's because he knows it will puzzle us. He knows that murders generally have their own way and stick to it."

The Inspector had risen to his feet and was staring at André with a faraway look, as though he was following a train of thought of his own.

"You mean that he's . . ."

"That he's one of us—or has been. . . . I can't get the idea out of my head."

He lowered his voice.

"Someone who's been up against it in the same sort of way as my brother. A discharged fireman might take to arson. It's happened two or three times. . . . A policeman . . ."

"But why should he steal?"

"Wasn't my brother in need of money? . . . This other chap may be like him in more ways than one. Supposing he, too, was a night worker and goes on pretending he's still in a job. That would explain why the crimes are committed so late. He has to be out all night. The first part of it is easy enough—the cafés and bars are open. . . . Afterwards he's all alone with himself."

As though to himself, Saillard muttered: "There wouldn't be anybody in the personnel department on a day like this."

"Perhaps you could ring up the director at his home. He might remember."

"Hallo! Can I speak to Monsieur Guillaume, please? . . . He's not in? . . . Where could I reach him? . . . At his daughter's in Auteuil? . . . Have you got the number? . . ."

"Hallo! . . . Monsieur Guillaume? . . . Saillard speaking. I hope I'm not disturbing you too much. . . . Oh, you'd finished, had you? Good. . . . It's about the killer. . . . Yes, there's been another one. . . . No. Nothing definite. Only we have an idea that needs checking, and it's urgent. Don't be too sur-

prised at my question. Has any member of the Paris police been sacked recently, say, two or three months ago? . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Not a single one this year. . . . I see. . . ."

Lecoer felt a sudden constriction round his heart as though overwhelmed by a catastrophe, and threw a pathetic despairing look at the wall-map. He had already given up and was surprised to hear his chief go on:

"As a matter of fact, it doesn't need to be as recent as all that. It would be someone who had worked in various parts of Paris, including the 15th and 16th. Probably also the 12th and 20th. Seems to have done a good deal of night work. Also to have been embittered by his dismissal. . . . What? . . ."

The way Saillard pronounced that last word gave Lecoer renewed hope.

"Sergeant Loubet? . . . Yes. I remember the name, though I never actually came across him. Three years ago! . . . You wouldn't know where he lived, I suppose? . . . Somewhere near Les Halles? . . ."

Three years ago. No. It wouldn't do, and Lecoer's heart sank again. You could hardly expect a man to bottle up his resentments for three years and then suddenly start hitting back.

"Have you any idea what became of him? . . . No. Of course

not. . . And it's not a good day for finding out. . . ."

He hung up and looked thoughtfully at Lecoeur. When he spoke, it was as though he was addressing an equal.

"Did you hear? . . . Sergeant Loubet. He was constantly getting into trouble and was shifted three or four times before being finally dismissed. Drink. That was his trouble. . . . He took his dismissal very hard. Guillaume can't say for certain what has become of him, but he thinks he joined a private detective agency. . . . If you'd like to have a try. . . ."

Lecoeur set to work. He had little hope of succeeding, but it was better to do something than sit watching for the little lamps in the street plan. He began with the agencies of the most doubtful reputation, refusing to believe that a person such as Loubet would readily find a job with a reputable firm. Most of the offices were shut, and he had to ring up their proprietors at home.

"Don't know him. You'd better try Tisserand, in the Boulevard Saint-Martin. He's the one who takes all the riff-raff."

But Tisserand, a firm that specialized in shadowings, was no good either.

"Don't speak to me of that good-for-nothing. It's a good two months or more since I chucked him out, in spite of his threatening to blackmail me. If he ever shows up at my

office again, I'll throw him down the stairs."

"What sort of job did he have?"

"Night work. Watching blocks of flats."

"Did he drink much?"

"He wasn't often sober. I don't know how he managed it, but he always knew where to get free drinks. Blackmail again, I suppose."

"Can you give me his address?"

"27 bis, Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule."

"Does he have a telephone?"

"Maybe. I don't know. I've never had the slightest desire to ring him up. Is that all? Can I go back to my game of bridge?"

The Inspector had already snatched up the telephone directory and was looking for Loubet's number. He rang up himself. There was now a tacit understanding between him and Lecoeur. They shared the same hope, the same trembling eagerness, while Olivier, realizing that something important was going on, came and stood near them.

Without being invited, André did something he wouldn't have dreamed of doing that morning. He picked up the second earphone to listen in. The bell rang in the flat in the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule. It rang for a long time, as though the place was deserted, and his anxiety was becoming acute when at last it stopped and a voice answered.

Thank Heaven! It was a wom-

an's voice, an elderly one. "Is that you at last? Where are you?"

"Hal! This isn't your husband here, Madame."

"Has he met with an accident?"

From the hopefulness of her tone it sounded as though she had long been expecting one and wouldn't be sorry when it happened.

"It is Madame Loubet I'm speaking to, isn't it?"

"Who else would it be?"

"Your husband's not at home?"

"First of all, who are you?"

"Inspector Saillard."

"What do you want him for?"

The Inspector put his hand over the mouthpiece to say to Lecoeur: "Get through to Janvier. Tell him to dash round there as quick as he can."

"Didn't your husband come home this morning?"

"You ought to know! I thought the police knew everything!"

"Does it often happen?"

"That's his business, isn't it?"

No doubt she hated her drunkard of a husband, but now that he was threatened she was ready to stand up for him.

"I suppose you know he no longer belongs to the Police Force."

"Perhaps he found a cleaner job!"

"When did he stop working for the Agence Argus?"

"What's that? . . . What are you getting at? . . ."

"I assure you, Madame, your husband was dismissed from the

Agence Argus over two months ago."

"You're lying."

"Which means that for these last two months he's been going off to work every evening. . . ."

"Where else would he be going? To the Folies-Bergère?"

"Have you any idea why he hasn't come back today? He hasn't telephoned, has he?"

She must have been afraid of saying the wrong thing, for she rang off without another word.

When the Inspector put his receiver down he turned round to see Lecoeur standing behind him, looking away. In a shaky voice, the latter said:

"Janvier's on his way now."

He was treated as an equal. He knew it wouldn't last, that tomorrow, sitting at his switchboard, he would be once more but a small cog in the huge wheel.

The others simply didn't count. Not even his brother, whose timid eyes darted from one to the other uncomprehendingly, wondering why, if his boy's life was in danger, they talked so much instead of doing something.

Twice he had to pluck at André's sleeve to get a word in edge-wise.

"Let me go and look for him myself," he begged.

What could he do? The hunt had widened now. A description of ex-Sergeant Loubet had been

passed to all police stations and patrols.

It was no longer only a boy of ten who was being looked for, but also a man of fifty-eight, probably the worse for drink, dressed in a black overcoat with a velvet collar and an old gray felt hat, a man who knew his Paris like the palm of his hand, and who was acquainted with the police.

Janvier had returned, looking fresher than the men there, in spite of his night's vigil.

"She tried to slam the door in my face, but I'd taken the precaution of sticking my foot in. She doesn't know anything. She says he's been handing over his pay every month."

"That's why he had to steal. He didn't need big sums; in fact, he wouldn't have known what to do with them. What's she like?"

"Small and dark, with piercing eyes. Her hair's dyed a sort of blue. She must have eczema or something of the sort, as she wears mittens."

"Did you get a photo of him?"

"There was one on the dining-room sideboard. She wouldn't give it to me, so I just took it."

A heavy-built, florid man, with bulging eyes, who in his youth had probably been the village beau and had conserved an air of stupid arrogance. The photograph was some years old: No doubt he looked quite different now.

"She didn't give you any idea

where he was likely to be, did she?"

"As far as I could make out, except at night, when he was supposed to be at work, she kept him pretty well tied to her apron strings. I talked to the *concierge*, who told me he was scared stiff of his wife. Often she's seen him stagger home in the morning, then suddenly pull himself together when he went upstairs. He goes out shopping with his wife; in fact, he never goes out alone in the day-time. If she goes out when he's in bed, she locks him in."

"What do you think, Lecoeur?"

"I'm wondering whether my nephew and he aren't together."

"What do you mean?"

"They weren't together at the beginning, or Loubert would have stopped the boy giving the alarm. There must have been some distance between them. One was following the other."

"Which way round?"

"When the kid climbed up the drain-pipe he thought his father was guilty. Otherwise, why should he have sent him off to the Gare d'Austerlitz, where no doubt he intended to join him after getting rid of the sandwich tin?"

"It looks like it."

"No, André. François could never have thought . . ."

"Leave this alone. You don't understand. . . . At that time the crime had certainly been committed. François wouldn't have dreamed of burgling someone's flat

for a tin box if it hadn't been that he'd seen the body."

"From his window," put in Janvier, "he could see most of the legs."

"What we don't know is whether the murderer was still there."

"I can't believe he was," said Saillard. "If he had been, he'd have kept out of sight, let the boy get into the room, and then done the same to him as he'd done to the old woman."

"Look here, Olivier. . . . When you got home this morning was the light on?"

"Yes."

"In the boy's room?"

"Yes. It was the first thing I noticed. It gave me a shock. I thought perhaps he was ill."

"So the murderer very likely saw it and feared his crime had had a witness. He certainly wouldn't have expected anyone to climb up the drain-pipe. He must have rushed straight out of the house.

..."

"And waited outside to see what would happen."

Guesswork! Yes. But that was all they could do. The important thing was to guess right. For that you had to put yourself in the other chap's place and think as he had thought. The rest was a matter of patrols, of the hundreds of policemen scattered all over Paris, and, lastly, of luck.

"Rather than go down the way he'd come the boy must have left

the house by the entrance in the Rue Michat."

"Just a moment, Inspector. . . . By that time he probably knew that his father wasn't the murderer."

"Why?"

"Janvier said just now that Madame Fayet lost a lot of blood. If it had been his father, the blood would have had time to dry up more or less. It was some nine hours since François had seen him in the room. . . .

"It was on leaving the house that he found out who had done it, whether it was Loubet or not. The latter wouldn't know whether the boy had seen him up in the room. François would have been scared and taken to his heels. . . ."

This time it was the boy's father who interrupted.

"No. Not if he knew there was a big reward offered. Not if he knew I'd lost my job. Not if he'd seen me go to the old woman to borrow some money."

The Inspector and André Lecoeur exchanged glances. They had to admit Olivier was right, and it made them afraid.

No, it had to be pictured otherwise. A dark, deserted street in an outlying quarter of Paris two hours before dawn.

On the other hand, the ex-policeman, obsessed by his sense of grievance, who had just committed his ninth murder, to revenge himself on the society that had spurned him, and perhaps still more to

prove to himself he was still a man by defying the whole police force—indeed, the whole world.

Was he drunk again? On a night like that, when the bars were open long after their usual closing time, he had no doubt had more than ever. And in that dark, silent street, what did he see with his bulging drink-inflamed eyes? A young boy, the first person who had found him out, and who would now . . .

"I'd like to know whether he's got a gun on him," sighed the Inspector.

Janvier answered at once: "I asked his wife. It seems he always carries one about, an automatic pistol, but it's not loaded."

"How can she know that?"

"Once or twice, when he was more than usually drunk, he rounded on her, threatening her with the gun. After that she got hold of his ammunition and locked it up, telling him an unloaded pistol was quite enough to frighten people without his having to fire it."

Had those two really stalked each other through the streets of Paris? A strange sort of duel in which the man had the strength and the boy the speed.

The boy may well have been scared, but the man stood for something precious enough to push fear into the background: a fortune and the end of his father's worries and humiliations.

Having got so far, there wasn't a

lot more to be said by the little group of people waiting in the Préfecture de Police. They sat gazing at the street plan with a picture in their minds of a boy following a man, the boy no doubt keeping his distance. Everyone else was sleeping. There was no one in the streets who could be a help to the one or a menace to the other. Had Loubet produced his gun in an attempt to frighten the boy away?

When people woke up and began coming out into the streets, what would the boy do then? Would he rush up to the first person he met and start screaming "Murder"?

"Yes. It was Loubet who walked in front," said Saillard slowly.

"And it was I," put in André Lecoeur, "who told the boy all about the pillar telephone system."

The little crosses came to life. What had at first been mysterious was now almost simple. But it was tragic.

The child was risking his skin to save his father. Tears were slowly trickling down the latter's face. He made no attempt to hide them.

He was in a strange place, surrounded by outlandish objects, and by people who talked to him as though he wasn't there, as though he was someone else. And his brother was among these people, a brother he could hardly recognize and whom he regarded with instinctive respect.

Even when they did speak, it

wasn't necessary to say much. They understood each other. A word sufficed.

"Loubet couldn't go home, of course."

André Lecoeur smiled suddenly as a thought struck him.

"It didn't occur to him that François hadn't a centime in his pocket. He could have escaped by diving into the Métro."

No. That wouldn't hold water. The boy had seen him and would give his description.

Place du Trocadéro, the Etoile. The time was passing. It was practically broad daylight. People were up and about. Why hadn't Françoise called for help? Anyhow, with people in the streets it was no longer possible for Loubet to kill him.

The Inspector was deep in thought.

"For one reason or another," he murmured, "I think they're going about together now."

At the same moment a lamp lit up on the wall. As though he knew it would be for him, Lecoeur answered in place of Bedeau.

"Yes. I thought as much. . . ."

"It's about the two oranges. They've found an Arab boy asleep in the third-class waiting-room at the Gare du Nord. He still had the oranges in his pockets. He'd run away from home because his father had beaten him."

"Do you think Bib's dead?"

"If he was dead Loubert would

have gone home, as he would no longer have anything to fear."

So the struggle was still going on somewhere in this now sunny Paris in which families were sauntering along the boulevards taking the air.

It would be the fear of losing him in the crowd that had brought François close to his quarry. Why didn't he call for help? No doubt because Loubet had threatened him with his gun.

"One word from you, my lad, and I'll empty this into your guts. . . ."

So each was pursuing his own goal: for the one to shake off the boy somehow, for the other to watch for the moment when the murderer was off his guard and give the alarm before he had time to shoot.

It was a matter of life and death.

"Loubet isn't likely to be in the centre of the town, where policemen are too plentiful for his liking, to say nothing of the fact that many of them know him by sight."

Their most likely direction from the Etoile was towards Montmartre, not to the amusement quarter, but to the remoter and quieter parts.

It was half-past two. Had they had anything to eat? Had Loubet, with his mind set on escape, been able to resist the temptation to drink?

"*Monsieur le Commissaire . . .*"

André Lecoeur couldn't speak

with the assurance he would have liked. He couldn't get rid of the feeling that he was an upstart, if not a usurper.

"I know there are thousands of little bars in Paris. . . . But if we chose the more likely districts and put plenty of men on the job . . ."

Not only were all the men there roped in, but Saillard got through to the *Police Judiciaire*, where there were six men on duty, and set every one of them to work on six different telephone lines.

"Hallo! . . . Is that the Bar des Amis? . . . In the course of the day have you seen a middle-aged man accompanied by a boy of ten? The man's wearing a black overcoat and a . . ."

Again Lecoeur made little crosses, not in his notebook this time, but in the telephone directory. There were ten pages of bars, some of them with the weirdest of names.

A plan of Paris was spread out on a table all ready and it was in a little alley of ill-repute behind the Place Clichy that the Inspector was able to make the first mark in red chalk.

"Yes, there was a man of that description here about twelve o'clock. He drank three glasses of Calvados and ordered a glass of white wine for the boy. The boy didn't want to drink at first, but he did in the end and he wolfed a couple of eggs. . . ."

By the way Olivier Lecoeur's

face lit up you might have thought he heard his boy's voice.

"You don't know which way they went?"

"Toward the Boulevard des Batignolles, I think. . . . The man looked as though he'd already had one or two before he came in."

"Hallo! . . . Zanzi-Bar? . . . Have you at any time seen a . . ."

It became a refrain. As soon as one man had finished, the same words, or practically the same, were repeated by his neighbor.

Rue Damrémont. Montmartre again, only farther out this time. One thirty. Loubet had broken a glass, his movements by this time being somewhat clumsy. The boy got up and made off in the direction of the lavatory, but when the man followed, he thought better of it and went back to his seat.

"Yes. The boy did look a bit frightened. . . . As for the man, he was laughing and smirking as though he was enjoying a huge joke."

"Do you hear that, Olivier? Bib was still there at one-forty."

André Lecoeur dared not say what was in his mind. The struggle was nearing its climax. Now that Loubet had really started drinking it was just a question of time. The only thing was: would the boy wait long enough?

It was all very well for Madame Loubet to say the gun wasn't loaded. The butt of an automatic was hard enough to crack a boy's skull.

His eyes wandered to his brother, and he had a vision of what Olivier might well have come to if his asthma hadn't prevented him drinking.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. . . . Where? . . . Boulevard Ney?" . . .

They had reached the outskirts of Paris. The ex-sergeant seemed still to have his wits about him. Little by little, in easy stages, he was leading the boy to one of those out-lying districts where there were still empty building-sites and desolate spaces.

Three police cars were promptly switched to that neighborhood, as well as every available *agent cycliste* within reach. Even Janvier dashed off, taking the Inspector's little car, and it was all they could do to prevent Olivier from running after him.

"I tell you, you'd much better stay here. He may easily go off on a false trail, and then you won't know anything."

Nobody had time for making coffee. The men of the second day-shift had now thoroughly warmed to the case. Everyone was strung up.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. . . . Orient-Bar. . . . What is it?"

It was André Lecoeur who took the call. With the receiver to his ear he rose to his feet, making queer signs that brought the whole room to a hush.

"What? . . . Don't speak so close to the mouthpiece. . . ."

In the silence the others could hear a high-pitched voice.

"It's for the police. . . . Tell the police I've got him. . . . The killer. . . . Hallo! . . . What? Is that Uncle André?"

The voice was lowered a tone to say shakily: "I tell you I'll shoot. . . . Uncle André. . . ."

Lecoeur hardly knew to whom he handed the receiver. He dashed out of the room and up the stairs, almost breaking down the door of the room.

"Quick. . . . All cars to the Orient-Bar, Porte Clignancourt. . . ."

And without waiting to hear the message go out, he dashed back as fast as he'd come. At the door he stopped dead, struck by the calm that had suddenly descended on the room.

It was Saillard who held the receiver into which, in the thickest of Parisian dialects, a voice was saying:

"It's all right. . . . Don't worry. . . . I gave the chap a crack on the head with a bottle. . . . Laid him out properly. . . . God knows what he wanted to do to the kid. . . . What's that? . . . You want to speak to him? . . . Here, little one. . . . Come here. . . . And give me your popgun. . . . I don't like those toys. . . . Why! It isn't loaded! . . ."

Another voice "Is that Uncle André?"

The Inspector looked round, and it was not to André, but to Olivier,

to whom he handed the receiver.

"Uncle André. . . . I got him."

"Bib! It's me. . . ."

"What are you doing there, Dad?"

"Nothing. . . . Waiting to hear from you. . . . It's been . . ."

"You can't think how bucked I am. . . . Wait a moment. . . . Here's the police. They're just arriving."

Confused sounds. Voices, the shuffling of feet, the clink of glasses. Olivier Lecoeur listened, standing there awkwardly, gazing at the wall-map which he did not see, his thoughts far away at the northern extremity of Paris, in a windswept boulevard.

"They're taking me with them. . . ."

Another voice.

"Is that you, Chief? . . . Janvier here. . . ."

One might have thought it was Olivier Lecoeur who had been

knocked on the head with a bottle by the way he held the receiver out, staring blankly in front of him.

"He's out, right out, Chief. They're lugging him away now. . . . When the boy heard the telephone ringing he decided it was his chance. He grabbed Loubet's gun from his pocket and made a dash for the 'phone. . . . The proprietor here's a pretty tough nut. . . . If it hadn't been for . . ."

A little lamp lit up in the plan of Paris.

"Hallo! . . . Your car's gone out? . . ."

"Someone's smashed the glass of the pillar telephone in the Place Clignancourt. . . . Says there's a row going on in a bar. . . . I'll ring up again when we know what's going on. . . ."

It wouldn't be necessary.

Nor was it necessary for André Lecoeur to put a cross in his notebook under "Miscellaneous". . . .



# Gerald Kersh

## Karmesin, Swindler

*You can almost name the crime and Karmesin will show you how it's done—with finesse if not always with success. This fraudulent fable of the world's greatest criminal (or liar) has an old-world charm sharpened by the bite of satire.*

BOP WENT MY GAS RING AND EXTINGUISHED itself. In combinations of six adjectives and three nouns I blasted and I damned the bodies and the souls of the Gas Companies. Karmesin was at this moment sitting at my table. He had in front of him a tin tobacco box, full of cigarette ends; with his usual deliberation he quietly extracted the tobacco which he put into a saucer and threw the torn papers back into the box. He could probably see in the dark. The failure of the gas did not disturb him. As I paused for breath I heard the faint crackling of the tiny pieces of paper and dried tobacco, and the ponderous deliberate voice of Karmesin demanding in an elephantine mutter:

“What seems to be upsetting you?”

“The gas,” I said, “I haven’t got another penny.”

“Yes,” said Karmesin, “It is irritating how little gas one gets for one’s penny. Nevertheless, my young friend, you must learn to be philosophical. Light a candle.”

“And how the devil,” I said, “can

I cook an egg with a candle?”

“Eat it raw,” said Karmesin; and crackle, crackle, went another cigarette. “Have you got any cigarette papers?”

“No.”

“Chort vosmi!” bellowed Karmesin.

“Chew it,” I said maliciously, pointing to the tobacco.

“All right,” said Karmesin. “Do not imagine that it is so easy to defeat a man like me. When you are my age, my young friend, you will learn a little philosophy. Calm, balance, and a faculty for objective reasoning—these things are necessary in this life.”

... I have mentioned Karmesin: that powerful personality, that immense old man with his air of shattered magnificence. I wish you could have met him—Karmesin, with his looming chest and unfathomable abdomen, still excellently dressed in a suit of sound blue serge; with the strong, cropped skull and the massive purple face; the tattered white eyebrows and the heavy yellowish eyes as large as

plums; the vast Nietzsche mustache, light brown with tobacco smoke, which lay beneath his nose like a hibernating squirrel, concealing his mouth and stirring like a living thing as he breathed upon it—Karmesin the greatest criminal or the greatest liar of his time . . .

"Listen," I said, "Suppose one cut a piece of cardboard the size of a penny—"

"No," said Karmesin. "It would be a waste of time. I know a man who tried that once. Not merely did it fail to work, but it also jammed the mechanism of the gas meter; and he had to confess to his landlord. To failure was added humiliation. He was a young man like you."

"Was that one of *your* great fiascos?"

"My friend," said Karmesin, "I do not indulge in fiascos. I have a creative mind, a grasp of facts, and an almost incredible foresight. When I swindle a Gas Company, it is not for pennies but for thousands of pounds."

"Thousands of pounds?" I asked.  
"Well, francs, anyway."

"Do you mean to say you have actually got money out of a Gas Company?"

"It was simple," said Karmesin. "But then, all truly great crimes are simple. One may always rely upon the ordinary man's inability to see the obvious. What is a genius? A man with a firm grasp of the obvious, plus a creative touch. Thus, in

the winter of 19—, when I found myself ill and temporarily short of money in Paris, I discovered a means whereby I could obtain free heating and light, and furthermore get heavily paid for doing so. In cash! 10,000 francs. That put me on my feet. It was with the capital that I obtained from the Gas Company that I was able to go to Brazil and perpetrate one of the most artistic diamond robberies of all time."

Karmesin is, as I have said, quite supreme; if not as a criminal, then as a story-teller. It is quite easy to associate that immense, genial, aged, and philosophical man of mystery with almost any kind of lawlessness. He has a way with him. You tend to believe every word that finds its way through his cigarette-stained Nietzsche mustache. But how could such a man stoop to crime? Or, on the other hand, to lying?

"I never know when to believe you," I said.

"My dear sir," said Karmesin, "I comfort myself with the memory of this incident whenever the gas fails."

"This is how it was. I found myself in Paris. In all businesses one has one's ups and downs. This was a barren period. It had been necessary for me, on account of certain unforeseen circumstances, to leave Geneva in a great hurry, and to travel in a third-class carriage across France. French third-class carriages even in these times are bad enough, but before the War they were worse.

It is scarcely extraordinary, therefore, that I contracted a severe attack of influenza which stretched me on my back in my little room, off the Boulevard Ornano.

"I may say that I carried French papers in the name of Charles La-vosier. I spoke French like a Parisian. That is nothing. I speak eleven languages like a native, even Finnish.

"You must imagine me therefore lying upon my bed in this abominable little room in the atrocious cold of one of the severest winters on record. My rent was paid for a quarter in advance and I had a certain amount of credit with the local tradesmen, but all my portable property was gone. I had no money and the room was very cold. This is the quality of Parisian blankets: they are of some diaphanous substance lightly sprinkled with fluff; when you cover yourself with them all the fluff flies into your nostrils leaving nothing but a sort of woven basis so thin that no bug dares to set foot on them for fear of falling through and breaking his legs. Even in the midst of my fever my brain began to work. Picture to yourself one unquenchable spark of genius fighting single-handed against the fogs and vapors of influenza—that was the brain of Karmesin! Outside, the snow came down, melted, and turned to ice. There were nights of frost—"

"Well," I said, "what about the Gas Company?"

"I'm just coming to that. Even in the midst of my fever I had an inspiration. I thought it out overnight and in the morning my gas lights were burning, my gas radiator was glowing, and I had stopped shivering; and yet I had achieved this *without putting a single coin in the meter and without tampering with its mechanism.*"

"How did you manage that?"

"Wait! A fortnight passed. The man from the Gas Company came to empty the meter.

"He read the little dials, saw that so many cubic feet had been consumed, opened the meter, and found it empty. He was a French official with an absurd beard.

"He said: 'M'sieur, your meter is empty.'

"I said: 'M'sieur the collector, that is nothing to me.'

"He said: 'But where is the money?'

"I replied: 'Monsieur, I am a sick man. I cannot sit here and answer your riddles. Have the goodness to go.'

"He said: 'Monsieur, this will have to be reported.'

"I said: 'Report to the devil.' He replaced the padlock and sealed it. All the same, I had gas for the next fortnight. Then the collector came again with another official. First of all they examined the seal on the padlock and found it intact; it was one of those complicated lead seals that cannot easily be tampered with. Then they looked at the glaring

lights and the red hot stove. Then the inspector gave me one of those looks with which lesser men than myself are so easily terrified, opened the box—and found nothing.

"You could have heard the argument as far away as the Place D'Anvers.

"Result? They decided that my meter was faulty, took it away, and replaced it with a new one. A devil of a meter, as large and as red as an omnibus, with a mechanism that made a noise like a lady in a car shifting gears.

"A week later they came again, again found all the gas lights burning and a room like an oven. It took them about three-quarters of an hour to open the meter, they had locked it up so tight. And what did they find? Empty space!" roared Karmesin, with a shout of laughter that made the water jug dance in the basin and the window panes vibrate.

"But Karmesin," I asked, "How did you manage it?"

"Wait," said Karmesin. "That is exactly what the gas people asked me. I simply smiled a mysterious smile and said nothing. And then one day, as I expected, I was politely invited to have an interview with one of the directors of the company, and he said something to this effect:

"Monsieur Lavoisier, I don't know what you're up to but it certainly can't be legal. What tricks have you been playing with our meter?"

"I merely smiled. 'Come, Monsieur,' said this gas man, 'we wish to be lenient. We do not wish to prosecute. Tell us exactly how you cause these meters to function without putting any money in and we will let the matter rest—we might even forget about the small item of gas you have consumed without paying for it!'

"I said: 'If I tell you, Monsieur, you will not only refrain from prosecuting but you will also pay me 20,000 francs. If you do not do this then I shall discreetly make public a perfectly simple method whereby the consumers of your gas can get it free of charge. In the end it would be worth more than 20,000 to you.'

"This is preposterous!" he shouted.

"You would have to change all your meters," I insinuated.

"We compromised at 10,000 francs and he went with me to my room."

"Well?" I asked.

"The whole thing was so simple. I pointed to the bottom of the meter and showed him a tiny hole, no larger than a pinhole. That was Number One. Then I showed him my cake of soap—Apparatus No. Two. 'Well?' asked the gas director. I took him to the window and opened it. Lying on the window sill were three other cakes of soap. In each cake was an indentation the exact size of a silver franc.

"It was so *childishly* simple. Into my little soap moulds I had poured water; the night frost turned the

water to ice; the one-franc piece of ice was just hard enough to operate the mechanism of the meter; the ice thus obtained heated the room; the heat turned the ice back to water which dripped out of the little inhole. Result? Invisibility!"

"That's extraordinarily clever," I said. "Did you get the 10,000 francs?"

"Yes," said Karmesin. "But what the devil was 10,000 francs? £500? £500! Chicken feed!"

Karmesin rolled some of his twice-used cigarette tobacco into a kind of mahorka-cigarette, in a bit of newspaper, lit it with a flourish, and fumigated his gigantic mustache with a puff of frightfully acrid smoke.



## Roy Vickers

### The Man With the Sneer

*Roy Vickers is one of the masters of the detective short story . . . even more notably in the soberly ironic accounts of the Department of Dead Ends, he has produced stories that rank with the finest contemporary crime writing. The preceding comment should have quotation marks fore and aft; it is the considered opinion of Anthony Boucher, criminological critic nonpareil.*

RHODE GRENSWOOD KNEW AS WELL as any lawyer that motive is at best no more than a clue for the police and a clarification for the jury. Yet he took great trouble to conceal his motive for the murder of Gerald Raffen and no trouble at all to conceal the murder itself.

Grenwood was a well-to-do distributor in the newspaper trade, supplying about a thousand shopkeepers with newspapers, books, and stationery. He was thirty-five in 1930 when he murdered Raffen, who was two years younger. Grenwood was efficient and progressive but unadventurous—a large man but well contained, of athletic habits, socially a good mixer in spite of a streak of melancholy.

As boys they had been contemporaries at Charchester School and were there in the year of the fire, which caused such a scandal. Raffen was injured in the fire, and for this—as all their mutual friends knew—Grenwood had insisted on

blaming himself. He had been prefect of the dormitory, responsible for the discipline and safety of twenty younger boys. The very public inquiry, courted by the school, gave Grenwood a wholly clean slate. When he persisted in his assertion that he was morally responsible, the presiding judge told him sharply that it was a form of conceit to assert that he could have done anything more to protect Raffen.

Hence, Raffen's left leg was artificial below the knee. In 1912, plastic surgery had not yet got into its stride. There was a two-inch scar on his left cheek, a lift on his lip which gave him a perpetual sneer; moreover, the left side of his face was paralyzed and vaguely out of focus. The total effect was short of being repulsive—passing him in the street you would hardly have noticed him—but one kept one's idle glance away from his face.

After Raffen's convalescence a strange friendship sprang up, in-

tense on Grenwood's part. With something approaching condescension, Raffen accepted an invitation to spend part of the summer holidays in the house on the Sussex Downs where Grenwood lived with his father, his mother having died some years previously. After two more such visits Raffen pleaded that he could not leave his mother so much alone. So Mrs. Raffen was invited too, and accepted—largely out of compassion for the nervous unease of Rhode Grenwood. After the inquiry she had gone out of her way to emphasize that neither she nor her son held him in the remotest degree responsible.

At her second visit Rhode subjected her—a widow—to an embarrassment of a nature that is astonishing when one remembers that he was then an intelligent undergraduate of nineteen. Gerald Raffen, as usual, had retired to the study after dinner to read. Rhode Grenwood joined the two elders in the drawing room, and solemnly—and somewhat pompously—suggested that his father should propose marriage to Mrs. Raffen and that Mrs. Raffen should accept, as this would make it so much easier all round for him to keep an eye on Gerald.

Mrs. Raffen recovered more quickly than Grenwood senior.

"At his age he thinks people of our age are so old that—that he doesn't even suspect that he might have made a fool of himself," she

said, when they were alone. "I'm worried about Rhode, Mr. Grenwood. He's hysterically determined to protect Gerald. And Gerald doesn't want an older brother. Something will snap somewhere, and I'm afraid poor Rhode will be the one to suffer. I feel that something ought to be done."

The necessity for doing something was shortly removed by the Kaiser's war, which swept Rhode Grenwood into the Army. By the time the war was over both parents were dead. . . .

Rhode Grenwood had no talent for soldiering. After six months of training he received a commission, by virtue of his civil education. He could manage the routine duties of junior officer but, like many another, he was secretly worried about his nerve. He was all right the first time he went into action. The second time, it was a very near thing indeed. In those days it was called "hesitation to obey an order in the presence of the enemy." But before the papers came through he was in action again and was cited for gallantry.

The citation brought him a Military Cross and he felt as if he had stolen it. That sort of thing pertained to "the boys of the bulldog breed," to whose company he did not aspire to belong. He knew that, at the time, he had been wrestling with his own animal terror of an enemy he regarded as superior in all the relevant talents. His nerves

had played tricks. A boyish voice, which he knew could not be in the trenches, was screaming his name: "Grenwood! Grenwood! *Grenwood!*" He believed he had screamed too as he rushed at the German machine-gun post, to escape from the greater fear. And the men had rushed with him—which had turned the nightmare into a success.

As commonly happens in such cases, the whole history repeated itself some months later; only instead of a short rush, it was a five-hour job and he was awarded a D.S.O. During the five hours, whenever he began totting up the dangers, his nerves produced the impossible voice, with the same cry. He was physically exhausted when he got back to H.Q.: waves of dizziness assailed him while he was reporting to the major.

"You had twenty men with you, hadn't you, Grenwood?"

"Yes, sir. I tell you, I counted them as they came past me. How could I possibly hear a boy shouting my name—with the woodwork of the cubicles crackling like the devil!"

"Wrong war, old boy!" said the major. "Have a drink."

Every week he wrote to Raffen, who replied at long, irregular intervals. On his home leaves (96 hours beginning and ending at the railway terminus in London) he always sought him out. On one such leave he tracked him, with difficulty, to a

cocktail party, where he met Jill Wensley, the grave-eyed daughter of a successful barrister, who had become a nurse. Besides the grave eyes, which looked as if she understood everything he wanted to say to her, she had the kind of voice he liked best and a physical beauty which, he assured himself, was far too individual to be defined.

Thereafter, he also wrote once a week to Jill; when time pressed, he began to write to her instead of to Raffen. Jill always wrote back. She told him, among other things, that Raffen and his mother had taken a house in the suburb of Rubington, where she also lived. This was good news, because Jill could keep him posted as to Raffen's movements, though, very soon, he was more interested in Jill's.

Jill, in fact, seemed to have pulled him out of his absorption. Jill and his own decorations, which he began to take seriously. The Army, after all, did not dish out decorations for nothing—the pose of the blushing hero who pretended it was all luck was being over rated. Why not admit to himself that he was—well, a brave man! By the time he was demobilized he had acquired a definitely appreciative view of his own character. In a sense, he had almost forgotten Raffen. He was in a great hurry to show himself to Jill in civil clothing.

When he called on Jill at her father's house, Raffen was with her in the drawing-room. Grenwood's

memory had slurred the perpetual sneer, so that it seemed to have acquired a new sharpness. Raffen stayed for five minutes and then, pleading urgency, limped off. Jill was charming, but Grenwood was inexplicably deflated. Now and again, he glanced at himself in a mirror, groping for the reassurance of the ribbons that no longer decorated his chest. So he talked about mutual friends and left early.

It took him a week of muddled emotionalism to ask Jill to marry him. When she said she would, he very nearly cried with relief. Then he braced himself.

"I'm going straight round to collect Gerald's congratulations!"

"Well, don't look so fierce about it, darling, or you'll frighten the poor boy," said Jill. And Jill laughed as she said it. An ordinary, happy laugh.

It was not ferocity at all. Twice, during the ten minutes' walk to Raffen's house, he came near to bolting to the railway station. But he plowed on, asking himself why he was making such a fuss about telling Gerald. It would not be startling news only a friendly courtesy.

Raffen had qualified as a dentist. His artificial leg left him a normal ability to stand. He was assistant to a practitioner in Chelsea.

"You look thundering well pleased with yourself, Rhode old man!" he exclaimed—which made things no easier for Grenwood. Remarks like that were always difficult

to interpret. One was likely to forget that the sneer was perpetual—and the poor chap's voice was always a bit raspy, even when he was not feeling waspish.

"Well, the fact is—that is, Jill and I—"

"Of course! But I had to wait until you'd said it. Thank God, there's still a bottle of old brandy in the sideboard!"

Coming from Raffen, it seemed a little too hearty to be true. But the strain eased with the aid of the old brandy. Raffen asked if they were to be married soon.

"As soon as we can fix things. I understand there's a sort of house shortage."

"It's difficult to get a house within fifty miles of Town, but you needn't worry. This place has eight rooms and half an acre. I live in two rooms and never go in the garden. If you think it would suit you, you can have it at a valuation. In any case, I'm going to live over the shop. Talk it over with Jill."

He talked it over with her a couple of hours later on the telephone. She seemed to hesitate, and then agreed.

They were married within a month. When asked to be best man, Raffen propounded a dental conference in Scotland. After their honeymoon they moved into the house that had been Raffen's. He did not come to the housewarming. Later, he declined invitations to dinner, with appropriate excuses. On the

death of his father, Grenwood had sold the house in Sussex. For a month in the summer they took a bungalow on the coast and asked Raffen for weekends, but in vain. By Christmas, it had become obvious that he would accept no invitation.

Again Grenwood enjoyed a respite. It lasted for nearly three years of contentment and steady progress in all directions. In his eyes, Jill retained her beauty, adding a jolly comradeship. Once more he found himself able to take an appreciative view of his own character.

The respite ended one morning at breakfast. Jill was reading the paper.

"Oh—it's about Gerald!" she exclaimed. She read on. "Drunk and disorderly and using abusive language . . . in a public house in Theobald's Road."

"Good Lord! That's a ghastly quarter at night—for a drink. Must have been some tomfool party going slumming—"

"No, it wasn't." Jill's voice was sepulchral. "The magistrate makes an inane joke about raising the price to regular customers. 'This time, Raffen, it will cost you five pounds.' Oh, Rhode, what shall we do?"

That, he thought, was an extraordinarily silly question. She was not often silly. Perhaps it was some trick of the light, but it almost looked as if she were putting on weight. She would lose her figure if she were not careful.

"I don't see that we can do anything," he said. "I don't see how we come into it at all."

"But we must! Getting tight is one thing. But in a pub! And that magistrate's beastly joke about regular customers!"

The regular customer joke was certainly an obstacle. Grenwood gathered his forces and rushed it.

"Probably the reporter muddled one case with another. Anyhow, there's no cause for anxiety. Gerald has his head screwed on the right way. In spite of his misfortune—poor chap! but most of us have something to put up with—he's making out. He's gaining clinical experience with a well-established man. His mother left him enough to buy a decent practice when he's ready."

In short, few men enjoyed so many guarantees of a successful and happy life as did Gerald Raffen. In the middle of it all Grenwood lost his nerve and dried up.

"I'll have to start for the office now," he said. "We'll talk about it tonight."

He was not, he told himself during the day, Gerald Raffen's keeper. Gerald would justifiably resent any comment on his conduct as grossly impertinent. He would explain all that to Jill.

The explanation fell flat.

"I don't understand, dear," she said patiently. "You used to be so concerned about him."

"That was some time ago. In the

interval—well, he's dropped us, don't you think?"

"You can't apply ordinary standards to Gerald. His disfigurement and his leg—that sort of thing throws a man out of the normal—especially with women. And I suppose he's made himself a social outcast and taken to drink and—the rest of it."

He had the false impression that she was trying to make him angry and that somehow he had goaded her into it. It was self-hatred that stung him into asking:

"I say, Jill, has Gerald some special significance for you?"

"That's a rather a funny question for you to ask me, Rhode." She paused, but he made no use of it. "The answer is—yes-and-no. As you know, I saw a great deal of him while you were in the Army. I found his society very stimulating. With me, he unbent, and I did the same. That was obvious in my letters."

"Were you about to tell me something that was not obvious?"

"I'm not in the confessional box, Rhode. I have nothing to confess to you, as my husband. Oh, dear, we're both getting worked up, and it would have been so much better to keep everydayish!"

"No, no—we're not worked up!" It was not because he doubted her fidelity that he must hear all she could be induced to tell him . . . "Finish it, dear, now you've started."

"A rather awful thing happened," she said. "We were in the drawing-room. He was rambling—and he can ramble beautifully when he unbends. I had turned on the light and was drawing the blinds. He didn't do anything suddenly—it was all part of the ramble, in a way. He put his arms round me. He intended to kiss me and I intended to let him. And then—God forgive me!—the light was on his poor face and I—I shuddered. He must have felt me shudder.

"He did not kiss me—how I wish he had! He put his head on my shoulder so that I couldn't see his face, and he said: 'I was going to ask you to marry me, but I'm not, now. Goodbye, my darling.'

"He lit a cigarette and sat down, and we both chattered a little to restore our nerve. Then he said: 'I think Rhode will turn up in a minute or two. I'll just stay until he comes, if I may.' I thought he was raving. But you did come—out of the war. You hadn't wired or anything, you know . . . I haven't seen Gerald since then."

Grenwood remained silent. Gerald could have found out about his movements if he had made it his business to do so. That proposal had been timed. There was some kind of system in it.

"That he proposed to me—obliquely, anyhow—is of no importance. That I hurt a sensitive man's feelings is very important indeed. So you see, dear, when you ask

whether he has any special significance for me, I think the answer must be—yes. You aren't upset, are you?"

"Not about your part in it, Jill." He added sharply: "I'm not upset at all. Why should I be? I've not even any complaint against him. You and I were not engaged. He had a perfect right to try his luck."

And Gerald Raffen had had no luck. Because he had lost a leg and his face was disfigured.

"So you see," added Jill, "I do feel we ought to do something."

During the next day he elaborated the argument about its being a gross impertinence to interfere with Raffen. The day after that, he stopped fooling himself and took a taxi to the dentist in Chelsea and asked for Mr. Raffen. He was imprisoned in the waiting room for an hour. And then the feather-headed receptionist took him in to Raffen's chief, and he had to explain.

"But Raffen left me about two years ago. I've no idea where he is now." The dentist was curt, but relented. "His professional conduct has never been questioned. You can find him through the Register."

The Register yielded an address, in the poorer part of Hamstead, which he found with great difficulty. Eventually he turned into a short alley in which there was an external iron staircase at the back of a stable of early eighteenth century design. He knocked with his fist on an ill-

fitting modern door, which was opened by a blowsy woman in a kimono.

"I am a friend of Mr. Raffen's."

"He's out now, dearie!" Grenwood did not believe her. "Couldn't you write, so's he'd be at home when you came?"

"You are quite sure he is out?"

The woman looked more thoroughly at Grenwood and summed him up with sufficient accuracy.

"Tell you what, sir. You come back in half an hour and I'll have him all tidied up for you. Make it a good half-hour, mind."

He made it three-quarters of an hour. When he returned it was Raffen who admitted him, Raffen in a decent lounge suit, looking very little the worse.

"Hullo, Rhode! I was expecting you. Come in, old man. Lottie-the-slut has effaced herself. This place used to be occupied by Wellington's head-groom. Not so bad, is it?"

It was indeed not so bad. It was tastefully decorated: some of the furniture he recognized.

"Thought I'd look you up. Jill is wondering why you never come to see us."

"And now you can tell her! If you do it tactfully, you can even tell her about Lottie-the-slut. I think her name's Lottie. They come and go. And you'd be surprised that most of them are jolly good charwomen."

"Chuck it, Gerald!" pleaded Grenwood. "What's been happening?"

"A natural process. I have found a milieu that suits me. But you're thinking of the police court, of course. I like noisy pubs and I like drinking a lot."

"Isn't it bad for business?"

"Hardly—for my business! I only do local work, and a spot of technical reviewing—which is all I want. As I've no future, I prefer to be comfortable."

"Why have you no future?"

"Because I wouldn't know what to do with it—because my history would repeat itself." Grenwood looked blank, so Raffen explained: "A few years ago—try not to laugh, *Ed man!*—I fell in love. Careless of me, but—she shared my slant on so many things. Each of us could light up the dark corners for the other. You can fill in the color for yourself—soul mates in a universe of two, with the rest of humanity just background figures."

He meant Jill, of course, Grenwood was at a loss. He ought to confess that he knew. But Raffen had already said enough to make it difficult. And there was no means of stopping him.

"I thought that my scar and the rest of it wouldn't count. And so did she—or she would never have made it possible for me to touch her. When I did touch her, her nervous system revolted. That was a shock for her as well as for me. It broke us up." Raffen paused and added: "She married one of the background figures—a worthy, beefy

fellow—and I borrowed the nearest Lottie."

Grenwood went to the window and stared down at the empty alley. Did Raffen suspect him of knowing that the girl was Jill? There could be no certainty.

"Isn't it rather knock-kneed, Gerald, to let everything rot because of a romantic disappointment?"

"I don't think of it in romantic terms. To me the girl is a symbol—a notice board. *Keep Off the Grass.* There is no place for me among my own kind—and I no longer want one."

Grenwood was stumped. A long silence was broken by a raspy chuckle from Raffen.

"I can do nothing to help you, Rhode!" The perpetual sneer gave emphasis to the words. "And for God's sake, stop trying to help me!"

On his way home, Grenwood churned it over. *He* can do nothing to help *me!*

His report to Jill escaped positive misrepresentation, but contained no reference to Raffen's "romantic disappointment."

"We have done all we can," pronounced Jill. "We shall have to try and forget that he ever existed."

To Grenwood that meant no more than leaving him out of the conversation. Raffen, he supposed, must be dipping into his capital. Dipping, not necessarily squandering. For a year or so, Grenwood did nothing about it, hoping that circumstances would again alter the

perspective and give him another respite. He began to lose weight. During 1927, he tried a series of tortuous little enterprises to help Raffen by stealth, all doomed to futility. There was an elaborate mechanism by which a hard-up dentist was induced to employ Raffen at a salary, paid by Grenwood. It lasted a fortnight. Frequently he would sneak out to Hampstead to watch the end of the alley. Twice during 1928 he saw Raffen coming home but lacked the courage to accost him. Now and again, catching sight of his reflection in a shop window, he would pretend that he could see a scar on his own left cheek and his lip lifted.

"Darling, I'm afraid you'll have to own up that you're worrying about Gerald."

"I know I'm a fool."

"A very dear fool! And a very brave man who is frightened of a shadow on the wall which he has made himself."

"There's no shadow on any wall!" he cried. "What's behind all this, Jill?"

"Rhode, you've been—ill—for a long time. You mutter in your sleep."

"What about?"

"That fire at Charchester."

"What do I say about it? About—the fire?" She could feel the words being dragged out of him.

"Nothing coherent."

"Then what has Gerald been saying to you?"

"Oh, Rhode! As if I would see Gerald without telling you!" She went on: "I've read the official report. It told me only what I already knew—that no one can tell me anything about that fire except you—and you can only tell me of—a shadow on the wall. Why don't you tell me, Rhode? It would vanish if we looked at it together."

Grenwood relaxed. The defensive irritability disappeared.

"My dear girl, it's nothing as elaborate as all that!" He laughed, almost naturally. "Perhaps I am a bit of a sentimentalist. But—one's past is always a part of one's present, if you see what I mean. We were close friends as boys. And I suppose I am haunted by what happened to him—especially as he seems to be making a mess of his life."

Two years later, Raffen's name was again in the papers, for the same offense, but at a different court. There was no joke by the magistrate and the fine was only forty shillings. The punch came in the last line.

*Defendant asked for time in which to pay the fine: when this was refused, he was removed in custody to serve the alternative sentence of fourteen days.*

So Raffen was penniless!

"I've got him now!" he said to himself, hoping that Jill had not read the news report. But Jill had.

"If he's difficult about taking money, you might be able to use the

fact that he could probably have got a hundred or so more for the house, if he had put it up for auction."

By midday, Grenwood had paid the fine and was waiting for Raffen to be released. In due course, Raffen appeared in the hall, unescorted. He was unshaved and looked dusty. It was a very cold day, but he wore neither overcoat nor gloves. The perpetual sneer was lifted in a grin.

"Congratulations, old man!" said Raffen.

"Come and have a spot of lunch," said Grenwood.

"Splendid!" They left the prison together. "Easy there! You've forgotten I can't walk as fast as you can."

Over lunch, in a restaurant near the prison, Raffen told a number of waspish anecdotes about himself in the prison. Grenwood, who was learning caution, contributed reminiscences of the Army. As the meal finished, Raffen lapsed into silence.

"Now we've stopped chattering, we can talk," said Grenwood.

"Little Tommy Tucker must sing for his supper," chirped Raffen. "We'll adjourn to my place. And we certainly can't talk dry. My cellar, unfortunately, is empty. Let's see, I owe you two quid for the fine, ten bob for the costs. On Friday I shall receive a check for a fiver for some reviews. If you can oblige me with the other two quid

ten, I'll endorse the check and post it to you."

Grenwood paid for the taxi, but Raffen directed it. It stopped outside a wine merchant's, where Raffen bought two bottles of whiskey, which Grenwood carried to the stable flat.

The first thing Grenwood noticed was that the flat was now very dirty—the stream of Lotties had dried up. Most of Raffen's furniture had been replaced with second-hand gimcrackery. They sat in upright chairs at a ramshackle table. Raffen opened one of the bottles. The glasses had to be washed before they could be used.

"Cheers!" exclaimed Raffen. Their eyes met. Each became aware that, after years of repression, the moment of open hostility had arrived. "Rhode, you're crumpling up, old man! Why don't you take to drink, too? We've got the same complaint. Both afraid of what we might see in the looking-glass."

Grenwood did not intend to be diverted.

"When you offered me your house at a valuation—"

"I remember! It was old brandy then. You liked it and I liked it. And you liked telling me about Jill. That was a very graceful fade-out, Rhode—until you spoiled it."

"If I had known it was to be a fade-out, I wouldn't have accepted your offer of the house. There's reason to believe that you could have got another five hundred for

it at auction. In the circumstances, whether you feel insulted or not, I must insist on repaying the five hundred."

Raffen laughed, drained his glass, and filled up again. Grenwood dropped an envelope on the table.

"In that envelope is a check for five hundred pounds, and twenty pounds in currency for your immediate needs. You can repay the twenty, if you like, when you've cleared the check."

"Jill put you up to that!" As Grenwood made no answer, Raffen added: "You're trying to buy. I have nothing to sell you. Drink up, old man."

"No, thanks. I'm going."

Grenwood stood up. He picked up his hat, set it down while he put on his gloves, then picked it up again, and put it on.

"Don't forget your luggage." Raffen pointed to the envelope lying on the table. "If you leave it there, I shall post it to Jill."

"You're broke, Gerald. You'll starve. They'll put you away where no one will understand your sarcasm. Why won't you take the money?"

"Because, though a down-and-out, I'm not a crook. Figure this out for yourself, Rhode. When one man says to another, 'I forgive you'—"

"Forgive me for what?" cried Grenwood.

"—the words mean only, 'I will not seek vengeance.' They can't

mean anything else at all. I knew it —when I was fifteen."

"*Forgive me for what?*" Grenwood's voice was dry and shrill.

"I accuse you of nothing. It's you who've plunged yourself into an automatic, self-starting hell. Good Lord, man! You've got the woman who would have been mine if the fire hadn't turned me into a gargoyle. And because I get drunk about it, you offer me money to mumble some maudlin abracadabra to free you from the curse. You will never be free."

Grenwood put one gloved hand on the back of the chair, to steady himself. His voice was quavery.

"You're quite right—except that it isn't any mystical nonsense," he faltered. "Listen, Gerald, if you can! I have a sort of nervous tic—a cloud in my brain—about that fire. You can clear it up. I'm groveling to you for the truth, as I've groveled for your friendship—"

"Rats, laddie! If you'd had a cloud in your brain you'd have paid that five hundred quid to a psychiatrist to shift it. I was wrong about the looking-glass. You aren't afraid of what you might reveal to yourself. You're afraid of what I might reveal to others."

"You must be drunk already, if you can believe that. The report protects me—"

"Jill would believe anything I told her about that fire."

"Leave Jill's name out of it!"

"We can't," asserted Raffen. "You

forgot that fire during the war. But you began to remember it again when you held my girl in your arms. Wait till I find my hat—I'll come with you. And you and I and Jill will soon shift that cloud from your brain."

"I won't take you to Jill. You're not sober."

"Let's see—yes, I have enough for the taxi to Rubington. Drunk or sober—with you, or without you—the result will be the same. She'll have a nervous revulsion against you, this time. Reaction in my favor . . . I never thought of that. What a joke! Jill! The last of the Lotties!"

Grenwood took in the words, but he could see only the perpetual sneer, which his hysteria magnified beyond bearing. He snatched up the unopened whiskey bottle as a mallet with which to destroy the perpetual sneer. He went on wielding the mallet until the bottle broke and the whiskey splashed over the blood-soaked hair.

He let the neck of the broken bottle fall from his gloved hand. Then he left the flat, shutting the ill-fitting outer door behind him. He had to walk for some five minutes before he found a taxi, near the wine merchant's. He noticed that the wine merchant's clock said five past three.

In the taxi that was taking him to the office he smelled whiskey. Some had splashed onto his shoes. He rubbed them on the mat.

That evening he gave Jill a sub-

stantially truthful account of his day, merely antedating his departure from the flat by some three or four minutes.

"I left him a check for five hundred, but I doubt whether it will ever be cashed. He was very spiteful."

"About—the fire?" asked Jill.

"Oh, no! Nothing about the fire! Just sneering at our attempts to help him."

"Funny! I did hear that he had been writing begging letters to people he met at the tennis club here."

"It doesn't matter to us. I shall never see him again. It will be easy now to take your advice—I mean, to forget that he ever existed."

The body was found the following Monday, five days later, by the rent collector, the news-agent and milkman having suspended credit. Before Inspector Karslake arrived on the scene the local police had discovered, from gossip, that a "tall, well-dressed gentleman" had emerged with deceased from a taxi at the wine merchant's and had accompanied him to the flat, leaving it at about three o'clock.

Karslake was at Grenwood's office in the early afternoon. The check and the notes, though an odd combination, very strongly suggested that Grenwood had been paying blackmail and had lost his head. Karslake began by asking if he knew Raffen.

"Very well! A personal friend."

He glanced at Karslake's card. "May I ask—?"

"He has been murdered," said Karslake and watched the reaction. There was, in effect, no reaction. Grenwood sat at his desk in silence.

"When did you last see Raffen?"

"Last Tuesday. At his flat. But I had better tell you the whole unhappy circumstances." Grenwood began with the meeting at the prison, was precise about the sums of money, the call at the wine merchant's.

"I was not there very long. Twenty minutes, perhaps. It was about three when I left."

The frankness of the report, corroborated by his own information, was disappointing to Karslake.

"Had he demanded money of you on any other occasion?"

"Demanded money!" snapped Grenwood. "He never did any such thing! I thrust it on him, having grave doubts whether he would cash the check. I've been trying to help him for years. I've had to resort to benevolent trickery—and the trickery failed."

At the blank look on Karslake's face he went on: "The poor fellow had a great many disappointments. He took to drink and messed up his career. My wife and I tried hard to find some way of helping him, but his social pride made it all impossible. As to that check, we both regarded it as almost a moral debt to him—" Grenwood told him about the house.

Karslake left, with the rueful reflection that the blackmail theory had fallen down, especially as Grenwood had brought his wife into it. The motive obviously had not been robbery. That left only revenge. Raffen evidently had been not a crook but a genteel waster.

In a week or two he had rounded up most of the Lotties, including the one who had seen Grenwood seven years ago. Gaining nothing, he traced Raffen, with some help from Grenwood, from the time he sold the house in 1919, which seemed far back enough. There was not the ghost of a motive against anyone nor the ghost of a trail. The only fingerprints in the flat were those of deceased and Grenwood. There were no prints on the neck of the broken whiskey bottle.

After a month's adjournment a Coroner's jury returned "murder by a person unknown." Grenwood told Karslake that he would be responsible for the funeral expenses and for any other claims that might arise because, as the Inspector already knew, he considered that he had morally owed the deceased £500.

In 1932—two years after the death of Raffen—Detective Inspector Rason of the Department of Dead Ends received a slip marked *re Raffen*, attached to a visiting-card, *Lieutenant-Commander N. Waenton*.

"I am a Naval officer," explained

Waenton, somewhat unnecessarily. "I've been on a foreign station for three years and didn't know what had happened to Raffen. I dropped in on the chance that Scotland Yard would be good enough to give me some information."

"Depends on what sort of information you want."

"I can't find out whether Raffen left any money, and I thought you might know. I have a small claim against any estate there is. I wouldn't bother—only, as you've probably heard, we're always broke in the Navy."

"I can't tell you offhand." Rason produced a dossier and rummaged in it. He came upon Karslake's note that Grenwood would be responsible for reasonable claims and expenses, wondering vaguely what it meant.

"As far as we are concerned," he said grandly, "it would depend on the nature of the claim. There is provisional—er—provision, if you understand me."

"It's an I.O.U. for a tenner." Waenton produced a pocket case. "And here's the letter that came with it. He sent the I.O.U. before I sent him the money."

The letter began, *Dear old Waenton.*

"You knew Raffen very well, Commander?"

"Not exactly. Hadn't seen him since we were boys at Charchester. Sort of special bond, in a way. There was a fire—we were in the

same dormitory. The other boys and I got out safely, but Raffen was badly scarred. Lost most of one leg, too. As a matter of fact I met another man in the East—a planter—not one who had been in the dormitory. Raffen had touched him for £25. I fancy he used an Old Boys list and wrote to everybody."

"Shouldn't be surprised," said Rason untruthfully. "If you care to leave this with us, Commander, I can let you know shortly."

When his caller had gone, Rason studied the letter. It was an educated version of the usual begging letter, with which he was familiar. Then he dived into the dossier.

"Grenwood says Raffen refused all offers of money on account of his social pride. He proves it by quoting the dentist, who was to pay Raffen a salary at Grenwood's cost. But Raffen writes a begging letter, to two men, on the old-school-tie gag. You might say Grenwood begs Raffen to beg from him and gets turned down every time. Why?"

The next morning he called on the dentist who had been approached by Grenwood, and asked for confirmation.

"The arrangement only lasted a fortnight. Raffen said, very bluntly, 'You haven't enough patients to need an assistant. Grenwood put you up to this.' I didn't admit it, but of course he was right. I never saw Raffen again."

In the afternoon Rason called at Grenwood's office.

"I'm following a money trail in the Raffen case, Mr. Grenwood," he said, almost as if he were speaking to a colleague. "I see a note by Chief Inspector Karslake that you are willing to pay all 'claims,' whatever that means. Are you willing to meet this?"

He showed him the I.O.U. and the begging letter.

"Good heavens! This is utterly incredible! You can take it from me that letter's a forgery."

"I never thought of that," said Rason. "Meaning that man wasn't a naval officer at all?"

"No, I don't! I mean that Raffen was friendly with some very low types. When he was drunk he might have spilled enough information for a crook to be able to write that letter."

"Thanks for the tip, Mr. Grenwood," said Rason, knowing well that no professional forger would take all that trouble on the chance of receiving ten pounds. Also, the letter was written from Raffen's address.

So far, he had only the naval officer's letter, the planter being too nebulous to quote. He sent the letter, with other specimens of Raffen's handwriting, to be tested for forgery. Then he thought he might as well try other old Charchester boys who happened to live in London.

The difficulty was to get hold of

an Old Boys list. Charchester was a couple of hours out of London, so he took a chance and called on the headmaster, asking for a list and giving his reason.

"I admit that Raffen wrote to me too—and that I made him a small loan. Some of the other masters were also importuned. But can this investigation serve any purpose, now that the unhappy man is dead?"

"We have to find out who killed him, sir. It's most probable that he was killed by a man he had been blackmailing."

"Blackmail! I hope he didn't sink to that. Cadging is bad enough. But to blackmail an old schoolfellow would be abominable. I feel sure you can put that thought out of your mind."

"Was there a contemporary of Raffen's here, sir, named Grenwood?"

"Your train of thought is obvious. And if I may say so, Inspector, as obviously fallacious. There was no possibility of his levying blackmail on Grenwood. The report made it abundantly clear that no kind of blame attached to Grenwood."

Rason agreed with enthusiasm, not having the least idea what the headmaster was talking about. He was given an Old Boys list and a copy of the report on the fire, which he read on the way back. From his point of view, it was a depressing document, for Gren-

wood emerged very creditably. Yet the headmaster had come over very headmasterish about that fire. Might be worth shaking it up in the lucky bag. . . .

So, back to the original riddle: Raffen had been cadging for fivers and tenners from everybody except Grenwood; and from Grenwood he had turned down offers of hundreds.

Perhaps because he was demanding thousands? There could be, he thought, no other explanation.

On his next call at Grenwood's office he took Chief Inspector Karslake with him.

"Our experts have certified that this letter and I.O.U. are not forgeries, Mr. Grenwood. Moreover, we know that Raffen wrote similar letters to the headmaster and other masters at Charchester. Will you admit that you misled us as to Raffen's character, admit that he had no social pride?"

"I have to accept your statement," said Grenwood. "I am utterly astounded. I can only say that I misled you in good faith—in the light of my own broad experience with him."

"Now, as we've agreed he had no

social pride, we want another explanation of why he refused to let you help him in a big way."

A long silence told Rason he had registered. Grenwood was racking his brain for a credible lie. Why had Raffen begged tenners from others and refused hundreds from him? The sneer danced before his eyes.

"I have no explanation to offer."

"The jury will want one," said Rason. "And they'll probably like to hear all we can tell 'em about that fire!"

Grenwood felt panic rising. As in the trenches long ago, his nerves played him tricks. Again the boyish voice that could not be there screamed his name: *Grenwood! Tell them you heard me calling your name and you wouldn't turn back because you were afraid for your own skin. Tell them!* And once again Grenwood rushed from the greater fear to an enemy superior in all the relevant talents.

"He was blackmailing me because he had found out I had been unfaithful to my wife. He asked too much. And I lost my temper and hit him with the bottle."

Again the sneer danced before his eyes . . .



# Peter B. Kyne

## Memory Test

*A fresh, breezy, and really delightful story by the creator of that grand character, Cappy Ricks (remember the old go-getter?). The late Peter B. Kyne was, in his time, one of the most popular magazine writers in America . . .*

THE DAY AFTER MY PROMOTION to sergeant I transferred to Central Station and reported to the chief of police for assignment. Another new sergeant was also reporting and the chief said, "Goldberg, meet Mannix, Timothy J. Mannix; Isidore M. Goldberg." Then he handed us the shields of detective sergeants and told us to report to Captain Moroney, chief of detectives upstairs.

"What sort of man is he?" Mannix asked with almost childish insouciance. "A patient man, I hope, who will not expect too much from a pair of rookies."

"He's as hard as rocks, Sergeant, but just; and if there's a better detective anywhere I have never heard of him. He's a driver. You'll know many a straight 48-hour shift on a murder detail and you'll learn to forget about your day off—if you make good."

Mannix and I exchanged long looks and I agreed with him when he grinned and said, "I'll not deny that there are ignorant Mannixes and Goldbergs, but I have yet to

meet them plain stupid." He put an arm across my shoulders. "Let us go up, Goldie, and endear ourselves to this tough but just chief of detectives."

When he called me Goldie I knew I wanted to be paired with him on any detail we got. As we went upstairs, I remarked that we'd be a good pair to draw to; that each would have something to contribute that the other lacked. To that he replied: "I see no objection to a man's thinking well of himself. Self-esteem should not be confused with self-conceit, and I'm delighted to be a detective because I *know* I'll make good." He gave me a slap on the back and we barged in on Moroney and found a big, fine-looking specimen of second-growth Irish with dark blue, kindly eyes and a mouth that shut like a cellar door. We came to attention, saluted and as if we'd rehearsed it, said in unison, "Rookies, sir." Then Tim jerked a thumb at me. "Goldberg, sir." He prodded himself in the chest. "Mannix."

"I knew you were coming," Mo-

roney said sharply and coldly.

There were visitors' chairs but Moroney did not ask us to be seated, so with a sigh, Timothy J. Mannix eased himself into one and I, not wishing to render Tim conspicuous, sat down in the other.

"In this office," Moroney said, "you sit when you're asked to. No lounging here."

"Goldie," Tim replied cordially, "is descended from the last king of Judea, while I trace my line back, in unbroken succession, to King Cormac of Connaught. We stand in no man's presence."

Moroney's eyes burned like headlights but what could he do about it? Tim had not violated a police regulation, but had merely yielded to the pixie in him to deflate Moroney, who to cover his confusion pointed to a framed motto on the wall. We read:

*The Real Detective Has No Heart.  
He Never Gives a Known Criminal  
An Even Break.*

There was also on the wall the framed photograph of a very handsome young man in the uniform of a lieutenant commander. Below his wings he had a number of ribbons, and one of them meant the Medal of Honor. So we knew this was Moroney's son and that Moroney wasn't averse to advertising the fact that he'd sired one of the finest.

I glanced from the photograph to Moroney. "I note a family resem-

blance, Chief," I said, hoping to remove some of the curse of Tim's behavior.

"My son, Sergeant Goldberg, and my only son. Thank God he's intact."

"God bless him," said Tim. "He did the impossible. He added luster to a race that doesn't need it. Isn't he the handsome lad? Is he married?"

"No," Moroney replied, "but he's engaged to the loveliest girl in all the wide world, and it's the happy man I am about that, because I'll have grandchildren to delight my old age that will be as much of a credit to the country as Johnny has been. Have you two any children?" he asked kindly.

I have two, a boy and a girl, age ten and eight respectively and I got their photos out of my billfold and passed them over to the chief. "Nice kids," he remarked. "No marriage is worth a damn without children. Now that you're a sergeant you can afford another."

Tim, too, had two youngsters and got out snapshots of them. "Both their parents are black Irish," he complained. "Black as far back as we can trace us, but those two are redheads and where the hell they got that I'd like to know."

"I can tell you," Moroney shot at him. "I think 'twas in the Eighth Century that the Danes came down and kicked hell out of us and ravaged and raped. So there's a bar sinister in your clan, Mannix, and

put that in your pipe and smoke it, you of royal descent."

That squared everything, so Moroney said, "Go up to the Rogues' Gallery and report to the curator, Corporal Gillogley, for a two weeks' course studying the mugs and records of our most undistinguished citizens, both in the poky and out of it. Your success as detectives will depend on whether you have the memories of elephants or gophers. At the end of two weeks Corporal Gillogley will give you a memory test. The passing grade is 70, and 60 plus will get you two assigned to the shoplifting detail."

We walked into Moroney's office uninvited, two weeks later, and laid our report cards before him. Mannix had 86 plus and I had 86. "Gillogley says we broke a track record." Mannix proclaimed sweetly.

Moroney telephoned Gillogley to verify the score, so we knew he could be just as big a stinker as either of us. "I'll pair you," he announced then. "Twould be no service to the department to separate two such brilliant intellects." He reached for a typewritten memo on his desk. "Here's your first assignment. There are no clues on this case, but if you two are as smart as you think you are that shouldn't bother you. Over the telephone I've discovered who pulled the job, but I'm hoarding that information. Unless you two tell me in two hours

the name of the man, out you go on your well-known fannies."

"The harder the case to crack the more joy in the cracking," said Tim. "The impossible jobs are cold meat for Mannix and Goldberg. Read the assignment to me, Goldie."

I read:

At 1:15 this morning Mrs. Herbert Mills de Grandcourt, who resides at the Hotel St. Dunstan, was knocked out in the drawing-room of her suite and robbed of jewels insured with Lloyd's of London for \$200,000. Case assigned to Goldberg and Mannix.

Tim said, "We could locate the culprit over the telephone but a ride up to the Hotel St. Dunstan this fine spring morning will be good for our metabolism."

In the elevator Tim said, "We're driving the hardboiled man crazy and he's called our bluff. Wirra, wirra, 'tis whistling past the cemetery I am."

We went up to see Mrs. Herbert Mills de Grandcourt and found her in bed suffering from shock and sock. She was about 70 and homely as a chimpanzee, and the thought of the old bag decking herself out in a fortune in jewels induced some saddening thoughts on human vanity. Later Tim confided he had had a similar thought and didn't much care whether we got her stuff back or not. Our sole concern, really, was in making good with Moroney.

It developed the old lady had got her jewels out of her safe-deposit box to wear to a party she was giving to friends the opening night of the opera. After the opera she had taken her guests to a fashionable night club, returning to the St. Dunstan at 1:10. Just as she was inserting the key in the lock of her drawing-room door somebody socked her from behind and when she came to, she was on her bed, and it was nine o'clock. From the knockout she'd just drifted off to sleep. She telephoned the management, which telephoned the police, and here we were on the job at ten o'clock. We got a meticulous description of the loot and discovered all of it had once belonged to her grandmother.

On our way downstairs to question the help, Tim said, "That crook was an amateur. This job wasn't premeditated."

"The jewels are antiques," I reminded him. "The early afternoon editions must be on the streets now with their description and no pawn-broker will take a chance on stuff so hot it's readily recognizable. If, as you think, this fellow is an amateur, the possession of those jewels will be nothing but a source of worry to him until he can find a fence sufficiently well financed to take the stuff off his hands—and that's going to take some time."

"We'll find him," said Tim confidently, "then tail him to the fence and acquire great merit with Mo-

roney. That is—I certainly think so.

First we asked the house engineer if anybody in his department had been working late on the sixth floor, for we were pretty certain an employee had done the job. He said an outside plumber had. A bride had dropped her engagement ring down the drain of the wash-basin in Room 605. Since the bridal couple were leaving on their honeymoon early the next morning, and as the house plumber was home sick, the engineer had telephoned a master plumber to send one of his men down. So the master plumber had roused one out and the man had reported at twelve; the house engineer had taken him to the room and indicated the job and left him there with the occupants.

When asked to describe the plumber, the engineer said he had not asked the man's name but that he was a tall, hulking fellow about 45 with a nose that seemed to be oversize anyway, and was bulbous and red, as if he had a disease in it.

We'd had all we wanted out of the engineer, so we went to the telephone pay station in the lobby and called up Moroney. Tim, still playing the braggart to irritate Moroney, said, "Mannix speaking, sir. Goldie and I know the lad that took the crown jewels, and we're an hour and a quarter under your deadline."

"M'm. Who is he?"

"Big Nose Lafferty, sir."

"I doubt it. Big Nose is a re-

formed drug-store bandit, and the last thing he'd do would be to prowl a hotel."

"Him and his schnozzle came up in Professor Gillogley's memory test. I admit that five years ago his specialty was sticking up drug stores. While he was serving his second term, acne developed in his beezer and when he realized his radiant bulbous snoot made a marked man of him, he decided to be a plumber." Tim then explained the connection between plumbing and the crown jewels.

"And what do you do next?" Moroney demanded.

"We've decided there's no hurry about picking Big Nose up. In a moment of weakness he robbed the old lady and now the loot's an embarrassment to him until he can find a fence strong enough to buy it from him. We'll tail him until he contacts the fence, then bring them both in."

"Take the day off," said Moroney. "And I wouldn't be surprised if you two developed into the common or garden variety of dick, provided you do not die of the swelled head in the interim."

Big Nose was fifteen days lining up an Honest John rich enough to do business with. An Honest John is, in underworld slang, a fence or receiver of stolen goods. By day Lafferty'd work at his trade but when he came home to his room and washed up, Tim or myself followed him to dinner, and then

through a section of the city where he'd be likely to find somebody to help him in his quest. On a Saturday morning he took a taxi to 60 Market Street, and there a very well-dressed, handsome man about 50-years old came out and got into the cab with him. I got out and Tim followed the taxi in his own old jalopy.

He returned in about half an hour. "That highly respectable man is the fence," he announced, "and is he the fox, making his deal in a taxi? I'm sure Big Nose didn't have the stuff with him, but I'm satisfied the trade will be closed today. Such deals are for cash and the fence went down into the safe-deposit vault of the Central Bank and came up with a paper-bound parcel. He's on his way back now."

While Tim was looking for a parking spot I watched the entrance to 60 Market Street and presently the fence walked into the lobby, paused at the cigar stand there to buy a package of cigarettes, and entered the elevator. I said to the cigar clerk, "Who is that handsome, distinguished-looking gentleman who bought the cigarettes?"

"That," said the clerk, "is Mr. Gerald C. Conklin—one of the smartest men in the real-estate business in this city."

"How come?"

"He's a specialist. Trades only in foreclosed properties. If it's a house and lot he paints the house and puts it in nice condition and sells

it. I bought a very nice little home from him quite cheap."

His office was posted on the directory 342-344, but just to be sure, I cased it, then returned to the building lobby. When Tim joined me we hung around the entrance an hour before Big Nose arrived, on foot, in his working clothes and carrying a leather bag full of tools. We went up with him, he turned right, we turned left into the right-hand corridor; in a minute we came back and waited at the elevator bank half an hour; when Big Nose came out and punched the bell I put my gun in his ribs and his big hands went up automatically.

A stairway ran from the top floor to the lobby, following the elevator well, so we took him down to the second landing where we could give him a private frisk. He wasn't armed and he didn't have the money on his person, so we looked in his tool bag and there it was.

We decided Conklin would be much too smart to keep that hot stuff in his office; in all probability he would take it somewhere else immediately. So I stayed on guard while Tim handcuffed Big Nose Lafferty, took him down to the jalopy and up to Central Station, where he booked him on suspicion of robbery, then beat it over to the City Hall and talked a search warrant out of the D.A.

He rejoined me in the lobby.

Conklin was still up in his office, so we went up to find the jewels and make the pinch. We turned in at the general office and found Conklin there talking pleasantly with a young man and a girl. His stenographer sat at her desk in a corner. Conklin came to the counter and politely inquired our business and, not wanting to embarrass him by stating our business and doing our job in the presence of his visitors, Tim said we were just a pair of homeless guys looking for a bargain in homes. The cigar clerk downstairs had referred us to him.

"Please come in," said Conklin, and led us into his private office. "Be seated, gentlemen, I'll be engaged in the other office for about five minutes, but make yourselves comfortable."

He went out, closing the door behind him—and in less than a minute we had the De Grandcourt jewels and were gazing out the window when Conklin rejoined us.

"At the moment, gentlemen," he announced, "I haven't a thing. I had a sweet little house this morning but have just given it to my daughter and her fiancé for a wedding present. You saw them in the outer office as you entered."

"And a very handsome couple, I thought," said Tim, always ready with a bit of blarney at the right moment. He stepped over to Conklin's desk, on which were rather large portraits, in silver frames, of two women—one a stately lady in

the middle-forties and the other, obviously, the girl we had seen as we came in. He turned to Conklin. "I hope you're furnishing the house for her, too."

"I am. Now, I expect to have two houses for sale in about 60 days and if you will leave me your names, addresses, and telephone numbers I'll be glad to get in touch with you so you can take a look at them."

We gave him the desired information and he wrote it down and we left. Fifteen minutes later we walked into Moroney's office and Tim tossed the package of money on the chief's desk. "We haven't opened it, sir, but we think it's money," he announced. "We remembered you verified our report cards when Gillogley graduated us, so we thought best to have you open that package and count the jack."

"The Irish," Moroney snarled, as if speaking of an alien race, "can forgive but it would kill them to forget."

He counted \$20,000 in century notes, done up in \$1000 packets. "Ten per cent of the insured value," he murmured. "Big Nose did rather well for a three-minute job. Where is he?"

"In the poky upstairs, booked on suspicion of robbery."

"Why suspicion? He's guilty and you can prove it, can't you?"

"It's only a temporary booking," I defended. "We thought Big Nose

might want to make a deal with the D.A. and if we booked him on suspicion it would be easier to turn him loose after he'd served his purpose. We feel a little sorry for Big Nose, because for the past five years he's run straight and the De Grandcourt job wasn't premeditated. He happened to finish his plumbing job and emerge into the hotel corridor in time to see the old lady pass him. There were no witnesses and he was tempted beyond his strength. We thought you might consider giving the big boob a break. We think he's more than a little simple."

"I think the same of you and Mannix." He pointed to his motto. "Read it again."

"We read that brutal creed once," Mannix replied. "That's enough." He laid the De Grandcourt jewels on the desk. The chief glanced at them casually and asked, "Who's the Honest John?"

"We've forgotten his name and address."

"So you would compound a felony, eh?" Moroney hinted.

I thought it was my turn to tackle him. "At least we don't hide our softness behind a ferocious front. Since the old lady is going to get her jewels back and we think we've frightened Big Nose and the Honest John into permanent reform, why can't you be charitable, spring Big Nose and forget the Honest John? Isn't that better than bringing shame and heartbreak to four

decent people? Isn't it now?"

"I know exactly how you feel, Goldberg," Moroney's patience was amazing. "When I was a detective sergeant I never put the cuffs on a man in high place without I felt like throwing up. 'Twas like dynamiting the statue of a hero. How did this John act when you caught him with the goods?"

"He doesn't know we've found them."

"I was never a man that fancied crossword puzzles. Give me the story from start to finish."

I told him the story up to the moment we had found ourselves alone in the fence's office—and why. Then Tim took over. "Of course, Chief, we take a quick gander around the office and on a window sill we see a row of potted plants. Goldie is fond of flowers so he steps over for a closer look. Then he says, 'Tim, what do you make of this?' and pointed to a pot. It was a green-painted tin pot like the others, but in the loam around the plant little green shoots showed, proving grass seed had been mixed with the loam and had sprouted recently—say four days ago. No similar sprouts showed in the other pots nor did the loam in them indicate that it had been disturbed.

"The pot had a bead around the rim," Tim continued, "and I picked it up and examined it and may I never see the back of my head if Goldie doesn't spot it for a phony! There are two pots—the outside

pot doing duty as an envelope for the inside pot, and it has no bead on the rim so the rim can fit up snug under the bead of the inner pot. Between the bottoms of both pots there's a space, and there we found the crown jewels."

Moroney was generous. "Brilliant work," he said. He reached for the telephone directory, thumbed through it, and called a number. When the call was answered it's a wonder our hair didn't stand straight up like a dog's when he scents danger. "Mr. Conklin, please," said Moroney smoothly. Then Conklin came on the wire. "Listen, Conklin," Moroney said. "We have a corpse in the morgue. We can't identify the man but he had one of your business cards in his pocket, so will you hop a taxi and come up immediately. Maybe you can identify him . . . thanks."

Moroney hung up. "There was only one amateurish touch in your operation. You didn't clear through me when you, Mannix, asked the District Attorney for the search warrant. That's customary, because the D.A. has to be very careful about issuing search warrants, particularly at the request of a dick he has never seen before. He has to be convinced there's sufficient reason to warrant it—and, unfortunately for you two, he knows Conklin. They belong to the same club and often play bridge together. So he telephoned me to confirm it and I did."

Moroney picked up the telephone again and we heard him say, "Spring Big Nose Lafferty. That suspicion of robbery charge won't stick. But send him down to my office—and give him a guide to make certain he gets here."

He had his secretary bring in two more chairs and when Big Nose reported merely pointed to one. There we sat in the most dreadful silence until Gerald C. Conklin came breezing in. "Hello, Mike," he said—and then his glance rested on the De Grandcourt jewels on Moroney's desk and he turned green and almost fell into the vacant chair.

Moroney ignored him. He pointed to the bundle of greenbacks and said, "Count that, Lafferty." Lafferty counted. "Twenty grand," he said.

"Give it back to Conklin."

Big Nose obeyed and Moroney said, "Lafferty, aren't you ashamed of yourself for socking an old lady?"

Big Nose started to sniffle. "I sure am," he confessed. "I might have killed the old frail."

"A word of advice to you, Lafferty. Save your plumbing money and after you're 65 you'll be able to live on your nest-egg, plus your Social Security. I realize the De Grandcourt job wasn't premeditated. Fate just handed you an easy one—and you forgot how easy it would be to pin the job on you. So be on your way, but keep your nose clean and your mouth shut,

or I'll frame you. Don't forget you're a two-time loser and the third time at bat means a home run for you."

"Now I've seen everything," Big Nose blubbered. "Honest cops with golden hearts." He gave Moroney a dirty paw and Moroney shook it cordially and Big Nose went back to his job. As the door closed behind him Moroney walked over to Conklin and gave him a vicious backhand slap across the mouth that lifted him out of his chair, and as he lay groveling on the floor Moroney kicked him half a dozen times in the seat of the pants. Then he opened the door, took the Honest John by the collar, and threw him out into the corridor.

He returned to his desk. "How did you discover my son is engaged to marry that swine's adorable daughter?" he asked. "There has been no announcement."

Tim explained and I added, "After seeing the photograph we recognized the original. We have the memories of elephants, not gophers."

"But why? You don't like me—"

"Oh, yes, we like you," said Tim. "Twas just that we found fun needling a man hiding his softness behind a defense mechanism and thinking he could fool us. So we played the smart aleck."

"You conspired to commit a felony."

"Oh, the hell with that," said Tim airily. "The sin is in being

caught. In a way we were loyal to the job, but why not be loyal to the chief, too? Besides, sir, we decided we owed your son something. We couldn't have lived with ourselves if we'd given the lice of the world the opportunity to say: 'See that young man? His father is our local chief of detectives, but his father-in-law is a convict.'

Moroney looked up at Johnny's photograph; then he got up and tore the framed motto down, broke

it across his knee, and tossed the pieces into his wastebasket. So we knew he'd turned felon to keep the world from hurting the son he loved.

Tim and I could understand that, for we have sons, too. As Moroney put his arms down on his desk and laid his head on them and we saw his shoulder heave, we tiptoed out, for when a man like Moroney weeps for his lost honor he prefers to weep alone.



# Stanley Ellin

## Broker's Special

*We once made the statement that "every single one of Stanley Ellin's short stories is a gem, and the group of ten in his book titled MYSTERY STORIES are among the finest stories of their kind written in the past decade." Here is one of those ten: if you have never read it, don't miss it now; if you have read it, don't hesitate to reread it—it has a rare quality.*

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN A GOOD many years that Cornelius, a Wall Street broker, had made the homeward trip in any train other than the Broker's Special. The Special was his kind of train; the passengers on it were his kind of people. Executives, professionals, men of substance and dignity who could recognize each other without introductions, and understand each other without words.

*If it weren't for the Senator's dinner party,* Cornelius reflected. But the Senator had insisted, so there was no escape from the abomination of abominations, the midweek dinner party. And, of course, no escape from the necessity of taking an earlier train home to the tedium of dressing, and an evening of too much food, too much liquor, and all the resultant misery on the following morning.

Filled with this depressing thought Cornelius stepped down heavily from the train to the familiar platform and walked over to his

car. Since Claire preferred the station wagon, he used the sedan to get to and from the station. When they were first married two years ago she had wanted to chauffeur him back and forth, but the idea had somehow repelled him. He had always felt there was something vaguely obscene about the way other men publicly kissed their wives goodbye in front of the station every morning, and the thought of being placed in their position filled him with a chilling embarrassment. He had not told this to Claire, however. He had simply told her he had not married her to obtain a housekeeper or chauffeur. She was to enjoy her life, not fill it with unnecessary duties.

Ordinarily, it was no more than a fifteen-minute drive through the countryside to the house. But now, in keeping with the already exasperating tenor of the day's events, he met an unexpected delay. A mile or so past where the road branched

off from the highway it crossed the main line of the railroad. There was no guard or crossing gate here; but a red light, and a bell which was ringing an insistent warning as Cornelius drove up. He braked the car, and sat tapping his fingers restlessly on the steering wheel while the endless, clanking length of a freight went by. And then, before he could start the car again, he saw them.

It was Claire and a man. His wife and some man in the station wagon roaring past him into town. And the man was driving—seated big and blond and arrogant behind the wheel like a Viking—with one arm around Claire who, with eyes closed, rested her head on his shoulder. There was a look on her face, too, such as Cornelius had never seen there before, but which he had sometimes dreamed of seeing. They passed by in a flash, but the picture they made was burned as brilliant in his mind as a photograph on film.

He would not believe it, he told himself incredulously; he refused to believe it! But the picture was there before him, growing clearer each second, becoming more and more terribly alive as he watched it. The man's arm possessing her. Her look of acceptance. Of sensual acceptance.

He was shaking uncontrollably now, the blood pounding in his head, as he prepared to turn the car and follow them. Then he felt

himself go limp. Follow them where? Back to town undoubtedly, where the man would be waiting for the next train to the city. And then what? A denunciation in the grand style? A scene? A public humiliation for himself as much as for them.

He could stand anything, but not such humiliation. It had been bad enough when he had first married Claire and realized his friends were laughing at him for it. A man in his position to marry his secretary, and a girl half his age at that! Now he knew what they had been laughing at, but he had been blind then. There had been such an air of cool formality about her when she carried on her duties in the office; she sat with such prim dignity when she took his notes; she had dressed so modestly—and when he had first invited her to dinner she had reddened with the flustered naïveté of a young girl being invited on her first date. Naïveté! And all the time, he thought furiously, she must have been laughing at me. She, along with the rest of them.

He drove to the house slowly, almost blindly. The house was empty, and he realized that, of course, it was Thursday, the servant's day off, which made it the perfect day for Claire's purpose. He went directly to the library, sat down at the desk there, and unlocked the top drawer. His gun was in that drawer, a short-barreled .38, and he picked it up slowly, hefting

its cold weight in his hand, savoring the sense of power it gave him. Then abruptly his mind went back to something Judge Hilliker had once told him, something strangely interesting that the old man had said while sharing a seat with him on the Broker's Special.

"Guns?" Hilliker had said. "Knives? Blunt instruments? You can throw them all out of the window. As far as I'm concerned there is just one perfect weapon—an automobile in good working order. Why, Because when an automobile is going fast enough it will kill anyone it hits. And if the driver gets out and looks sorry he'll find that he's the one getting everybody's sympathy, and not that bothersome corpse on the ground who shouldn't have been in the way anyhow. As long as the driver isn't drunk or flagrantly reckless he can kill anybody in this country he wants to, and suffer no more than a momentary embarrassment and a penalty that isn't even worth worrying about."

"Think it over, man," the Judge continued: "to most people the automobile is some sort of god, and if God happens to strike you down it's your hard luck. As for me, when I cross a street I just say a little prayer."

There was more of that in Judge Hilliker's mordant and long-winded style, but Cornelius had no need to remember it. What he needed he now had, and very carefully he put

the gun back in the drawer, slid the drawer shut, and locked it.

Claire came in while he still sat brooding at the desk, and he forced himself to regard her with cold objectivity—this radiantly lovely woman who was playing him for a fool, and who now stood wide-eyed in the doorway with an incongruously large bag of groceries clutched to her.

"I saw the car in the garage," she said breathlessly. "I was afraid something was wrong. That you weren't feeling well . . ."

"I feel very well."

"But you're home so early. You've never come this early before."

"I've always managed to refuse invitations to midweek dinner parties before."

"Oh, Lord!" she gasped. "The dinner! It never even entered my mind. I've been so busy all day . . ."

"Yes?" he said. "Doing what?"

"Well, everyone's off today, so I took care of the house from top to bottom, and then when I looked in the pantry and saw we needed some things I ran into town for them." She gestured at the bulky paper bag with her chin. "I'll have your bath ready, and your things laid out as soon as I put this stuff away."

Watching her leave he felt an honest admiration for her. Another woman would have invented a visit to a friend who might, at some later time, accidentally let the cat out of

the bag. Or another woman would not have thought to burden herself with a useless package to justify a trip into town. But not Claire who was evidently as clever as she was beautiful.

And she *was* damnably attractive. His men friends may have laughed behind his back, but in their homes she was always eagerly surrounded by them. When he entered a roomful of strangers with her he saw how all men's eyes followed her with a frankly covetous interest. No, nothing must happen to her; nothing at all. It was the man who had to be destroyed, just as one would destroy any poacher on his preserves, any lunatic who with axe in hand ran amok through his home. Claire would have to be hurt a little, would have to be taught her lesson, but that would be done most effectively through what happened to the man.

Cornelius learned very quickly that his plans would have to take in a good deal more than the simple act of waylaying the man and running him down. There were details, innumerable details covering every step of the way before and after the event, which had to be jigsawed into place bit by bit in order to make it perfect.

In that respect, Cornelius thought gratefully, the Judge had been far more helpful than he had realized in his irony. Murder by automobile was the perfect murder, because,

with certain details taken care of, it was not even murder at all! There was the victim, and there was the murderer standing over him, and the whole thing would be treated with perfunctory indifference. After all, what was one more victim among the thirty thousand each year? He was a statistic, to be regarded with some tongue-clicking and a shrug of helplessness.

Not by Claire, of course. Coincidence can be stretched far, but hardly far enough to cover the case of a husband's running down his wife's lover. And that was the best part of it. Claire would know, but would be helpless to say anything, since saying anything must expose her own wrong-doing. She would spend her life, day after day, knowing that she had been found out, knowing that a just vengeance had been exacted, and standing forewarned against any other such temptations that might come her way.

But what of the remote possibility that she might choose to speak out and expose herself? There, Cornelius reflected, fitting another little piece of the jigsaw into place, coincidence would instantly go to work for him. If there was no single shred of evidence that he had ever suspected her affair, or that he had ever seen the man before, the accident *must* be regarded by the law as coincidence. Either way his position was unassailable.

It was with this in mind that he

patiently and single-mindedly went to work on his plans. He was tempted at the start to call in some professional investigator who could promptly and efficiently bring him the information he wanted, but after careful consideration he put this idea aside. A smart investigator might easily put two and two together after the accident. If he were honest he might go to the authorities with his suspicions; if he were dishonest he might be tempted to try blackmail. Obviously, there was no way of calling in an outsider without risking one danger or the other. And nothing, nothing at all, was going to be risked here.

So it took Cornelius several precious weeks to glean the information he wanted, and, as he admitted to himself, it might have taken even longer had not Claire and the man maintained such an unfailing routine. Thursday was the one day of the week on which the man would pay his visits. Then, a little before the city-bound train arrived at the station, Claire would drive the station wagon into an almost deserted side-street a block from the Plaza. In the car the couple would kiss with an intensity that made Cornelius's flesh crawl.

As soon as the man left the car Claire would drive swiftly away, and the man would walk briskly to the Plaza, make his way through the cars parked at the curb there, cross the Plaza obviously sunk in his own thoughts and with only

half an eye for passing traffic, and would enter the station. The third time Cornelius witnessed this performance he could have predicted the man's every step with deadly accuracy.

Occasionally, during this period, Claire mentioned that she was going to the city to do some shopping, and Cornelius took advantage of this as well. He was standing in a shadow of the terminal's waiting room when her train pulled in, he followed her at a safe distance to the street; his cab trailed hers almost to the door of the shabby apartment house where the man lived. The man was sitting on the grimy steps of the house, obviously waiting for her. When he led her into the house, as Cornelius bitterly observed, they held hands like a pair of school children, and then there was a long wait, a wait which took up most of the afternoon; but Cornelius gave up waiting before Claire reappeared.

The eruption of fury he knew after that scene gave him the idea of staging the accident there on the city streets the next day, but Cornelius quickly dismissed the thought. It would mean driving the car into the city, which was something he never did, and that would be a dangerous deviation from his own routine. Besides, city tabloids, unlike his staid local newspaper, sometimes publicized automobile accidents not only by printing the news of them, but also by

displaying pictures of victim and culprit on their pages. He wanted none of that. This was a private affair. Strictly private.

No, there was no question that the only place to settle matters was right in the Plaza itself, and the more Cornelius reviewed his plans in preparation for the act the more he marveled at how flawless they were.

Nothing could conceivably go wrong. If by some mischance he struck down the man without killing him, his victim would be in the same position as Claire: unable to speak openly without exposing himself. If he missed the man entirely he was hardly in the dangerous position of an assassin who misses his victim and is caught with the gun or knife in his hand. An automobile wasn't a weapon; the affair would simply be another close call for a careless pedestrian.

However, he wanted no close calls, and to that end he took to parking the car somewhat farther from the station than he ordinarily did. The extra distance, he estimated, would allow him to swing the car across the Plaza in an arc which would meet the man as he emerged from between the parked cars across the street. That would just about make explanations uncalled-for. A man stepping out from between parked cars would be more in violation of the law than the driver who struck him!

Not only did he make sure to set

the car at a proper distance from the station entrance, but Cornelius also took to backing it into place as some other drivers did. Now the front wheels were facing the Plaza, and he could quickly get up all the speed he wanted. More than that, he would be facing the man from the instant he came into sight.

The day before the one he had chosen for the final act, Cornelius waited until he was clear of traffic on his homeward drive, and then stopped the car on a deserted part of the road, letting the motor idle. Then he carefully gauged the distance to a tree some 30 yards ahead; this, he estimated, would be the distance across the Plaza. He started the car, and then drove it as fast as he could past the tree, the big machine snarling as it picked up speed. Once past the tree he braced himself, stepped hard on the brake, and felt the pressure of the steering wheel against his chest as the car slewed to a shrieking stop.

That was it. That was all there was to it . . .

He left the office the next day at the exact minute he had set for himself. After his secretary had helped him on with his coat he turned to her as he had prepared himself to do, and made a wry face.

"Just not feeling right," he said. "Don't know what's wrong with me, Miss Wynant."

And, as he knew good secretaries were trained to do, she frowned

worriedly at him, and said, "If you didn't work so hard, Mr. Bolinger . . ."

He waved that aside brusquely. "Nothing that getting home early to a good rest won't cure. Oh," he slapped at the pockets of his coat, "my pills, Miss Wynant. They're in the top drawer over there."

They were only a few aspirins in an envelope, but it was the impression that counted. A man who was not feeling well had that much more justification for a mishap while he was driving.

The early train was familiar to him now; he had ridden on it several times during the past few weeks, but always circumspectly hidden behind a newspaper. Now it was to be different. When the conductor came through to check his commutation ticket, Cornelius was sitting limp in his seat, clearly a man in distress.

"Conductor," he asked, "if you don't mind, could you get me some water?"

The conductor glanced at him and hastily departed. When he returned with a dripping cup of water Cornelius slowly and carefully removed an aspirin from the envelope and washed it down gratefully.

"If there's anything else," the conductor said, "just you let me know."

"No," Cornelius said, "no, I'm a little under the weather, that's all."

But at the station the conductor

was there to lend him a solicitous hand down, and dally briefly. "You're not a regular, are you?" the conductor said. "At least, not on this train."

Cornelius felt a lift of gratification. "No," he said, "I've only taken this train once before. I usually travel on the Broker's Special."

"Oh." The conductor looked him up and down, and grinned. "Well, that figures," he said. "Hope you found our service as good as the Special's."

In the small station Cornelius sat down on a bench, his head resting against the back of the bench, his eyes on the clock over the ticket agent's window. Once or twice he saw the agent glance worriedly through the window at him, and that was fine. What was not so fine was the rising feeling in him, a lurching nervousness in his stomach, a too-heavy thudding of his heart in his chest. He had allowed himself ten minutes here; each minute found the feeling getting more and more oppressive. It was an effort to contain himself, to prevent himself from getting to his feet and rushing out to the car before the minute hand of the clock had touched the small black spot that was his signal.

Then, on the second, he got up, surprised at the effort it required to do this, and slowly walked out of the station, the agent's eyes following him all the way, and down past the station to the car. He climbed

behind the wheel, closed the door firmly after him, and started the motor. The soft purring of the motor under his feet sent a new strength up through him. He sat there soaking it up, his eyes fixed on the distance across the Plaza.

When the man first appeared, moving with rapid strides toward him, it struck Cornelius in some strange way that the tall, blond figure was like a puppet being drawn by an invisible wire to his destined place on the stage. Then, as he came closer, it was plain to see that he was smiling broadly, singing aloud in his exuberance of youth and strength—and triumph. That was the key which unlocked all paralysis, which sent the motor roaring into furious life.

For all the times he had lived the scene in his mind's eye, Cornelius was unprepared for the speed with which it happened. There was the man stepping out from between the cars, still blind to everything. There was Cornelius's hand on the horn, the ultimate inspiration, a warning that could not possibly be heeded, and more than anything else an insurance of success. The man swung toward the noise, his face all horror, his hands outthrust as if to fend off what was happening. There was the high-pitched scream abruptly cut off by the shock of impact, more violent than Cornelius had ever dreamed, and then everything dissolving into the screech of brakes.

The Plaza had been deserted before it had happened; now, people were running from all directions, and Cornelius had to push his way through them to catch a glimpse of the body.

"Better not look," someone warned, but he did look, and saw the crumpled form, the legs scissored into an unnatural position, the face graying as he watched. He swayed, and a dozen helping hands reached out to support him, but it was not weakness which affected him now; but an overwhelming, giddy sense of victory, a sense of victory heightened by the voices around him.

*"Walked right into it with his eyes wide open."*

*"I could hear that horn a block away..."*

*"Drunk, maybe. The way he stood right there . . ."*

The only danger now lay in over-playing his hand. He had to watch out for that, had to keep fitting piece after piece of the plan together, and then there would be no danger. He sat in the car while a policeman questioned him with official gravity, and he knew from the growing sympathy in the policeman's voice that he was making the right impression.

No, he was free to go home if he wished. Charges, of course, had to be automatically preferred against him, but the way things looked . . . Yes, they would be glad to phone Mrs. Bolinger. They could

drive him home, but if he preferred to have her do it . . .

He had allowed time enough for her to be at home when the call was made, and he spent the next fifteen minutes with the crowd staring at him through the car window with a morbid and sympathetic curiosity. When the station wagon drew up nearby, a lane magically appeared through the crowd; when Claire was at his side the lane disappeared.

Even frightened and bewildered, she was a beautiful woman, Cornelius thought, and, he had to admit to himself, she knew how to put on a sterling show of wifely concern and devotion, false as it was. But perhaps that was because she didn't know yet, and it was time for her to know.

He waited until she had helped him into the station wagon, and when she sat down in the driver's seat he put an arm tight around her.

"Oh, by the way, officer," he asked with grave anxiety through the open window. "Did you find out who the man was? Did he have any identification on him?"

The policeman nodded. "Young fellow from the city," he said, "so we'll have to check up on him down there. Name of Lundgren. Robert Lundgren, if his card means anything."

Against his arm Cornelius felt, rather than heard, the choked gasp, felt the uncontrollable small shiver-

ing. Her face was as gray as that of the man's out there in the street. "All right, Claire," he said softly. "Let's go home."

She drove by instinct out through the streets of the town. Her face was vacuous, her eyes set and staring. He was almost grateful when they reached the highway, and she finally spoke in a quiet and wondering voice. "You knew," she said. "You knew about it, and you killed him for it."

"Yes," Cornelius said, "I knew about it."

"Then you're crazy," she said dispassionately, her eyes still fixed ahead of her. "You must be crazy to kill someone like that."

Her even, informative tone fired his anger as much as what she was saying.

"It was justice," he said between his teeth. "It was coming to him."

She was still remote. "You don't understand."

"Don't understand what?"

She turned toward him, and he saw that her eyes were glistening wet. "I knew him before I ever knew you, before I ever started working in the office. We always went together; it didn't seem as if there was any point living if we couldn't be together." She paused only a fraction of a second.

"But things didn't go right. He had big ideas that didn't make any money, and I couldn't stand that. I was born poor, and I couldn't stand marrying poor and dying poor . . .

That's why I married you. And I tried to be a good wife—you'll never know how hard I tried!—but that wasn't what you wanted. You wanted a showpiece, not a wife; something to parade around in front of people so that they could admire you for owning it, just like they admire you for everything else you own."

"You're talking like a fool," he said harshly. "And watch the road. We turn off here."

"Listen to me!" she said. "I was going to tell you all about it. I was going to ask for a divorce. Not a penny to go with it, or anything like that—just the divorce so that I could marry him and make up for all the time I had thrown away! That's what I told him today, and if you had only asked—only talked to me—"

She would get over it, he thought. It had been even more serious than he had realized, but, as the saying

went, *all passes*. She had nothing to trade her marriage for any longer; when she understood that clearly they would make a new start. It was a miracle that he had thought of using the weapon he had, and that he had used it so effectively. *A perfect weapon*, the Judge had said. He'd never know how perfect.

It was the warning clangor of the bell at the grade crossing that jarred Cornelius from his reverie—that, and the alarming realization that the car's speed was not slackening at all. Then everything else was submerged by the angry bawling of a Diesel horn, and when he looked up incredulously, it was to the raging mountain of steel that was the Broker's Special hurling itself over the crossing directly ahead.

"Watch out!" he cried out wildly. "My God, what are you doing!"

In that last split second, when her foot went down hard on the accelerator, he knew.



## André Maurois

### Suicide Hotel

*André Maurois has been called "a sophisticate who writes for people who love the urbane." His work has also been described as having delicacy of style and charming irony. You will find all these qualities in the curious little tale that follows.*

**W**HAT'S STEEL?" ASKED JEAN Monnier.

"Fifty-nine and one-fourth," answered one of a dozen clerks.

The clicking of their machines formed a jazz-like rhythm. Outside the window loomed the giant skyscrapers of Manhattan, their forty or fifty stories pierced by precise rows of windows. Telephones screamed and ribbons of paper unrolled with incredible rapidity, filling the office with their sinister serpentes, covered with cryptic letters and figures.

"Steel?" said Jean Monnier.

"Fifty-nine," answered Gertrude Miller.

She stopped a moment to look at the young Frenchman. Hunched in an armchair, his head in his hands, he seemed crushed.

"Another one who has gambled," she thought. "Tough luck for him. And tough luck for Fanny."

For two years before Jean Monnier, attached to the New York office of the Banque Holmann, had married his pretty and clever American secretary.

A voice hallooed outside the door. Harry Cooper entered. Jean Monnier rose.

"What a session!" said Harry Cooper. "Every stock down 20 per cent. And one still finds imbeciles who say this isn't a crisis."

"It is a crisis," said Jean Monnier.

And he went out.

"That one's been hit," said Harry Cooper.

"Yes," said Gertrude Miller, "he's gambled his shirt. Fanny told me so. She's going to leave him tonight."

"Tough luck for him," said Harry Cooper.

The beautiful bronze doors of the elevator slid open.

"Down," said Jean Monnier.

The whole of the little fortune amassed in Arizona had been advanced for margin in his stock transactions. He was through. In the street, hurrying for his train, he tried to imagine the future. If Fanny withheld her blow, it was not impossible. He remembered his

first struggles, his rapid rise. After all, he was barely thirty. But, he knew beyond all doubt that Fanny would be merciless and she definitely was.

When he woke up alone the next morning, he felt drained of all courage. Despite Fanny's harshness, he had loved her. The maid served his melon and cereal, and then stepped back and blandly asked for money.

He gave her fifteen dollars, then cast up his accounts. He had left a little less than \$600. It was enough to live on for one, perhaps two, months. After that? He looked out the window. Almost every day for a week there had been stories of suicides in the newspapers. Bankers, stock salesmen, speculators chose death to a battle already lost. A fall of twenty stories? How many seconds? Three, four . . . then that quashing on the pavement. But if the shock did not kill him? He imagined atrocious sufferings, his limbs broken, his flesh crushed to pulp. He sighed, then, a newspaper under his arm, went to lunch at a restaurant, where he was surprised to find how good pancakes flooded with maple syrup still tasted.

"Thanatos Palace Hotel . . . New Mexico . . . Who could possibly be writing to me from that bizarre address?"

Below three engraved cypresses, he read:

#### THANATOS PALACE HOTEL

Manager: Henry Boerstecher

Dear Sir:

If we approach you today, it is not by chance but because we have information about you which permits us to think and to hope that our services may be of some use to you.

You certainly cannot but have noticed that, in the life of the most courageous man, there may arise circumstances so completely inimical that further struggle becomes impossible and the idea of death comes to seem a deliverance.

To close the eyes, to sleep, never to wake again, to hear no more questions or reproaches. . . . Many of us have fashioned this dream, formulated this wish. However, aside from a few cases, men do not dare to flee their ills, and this is understandable when one observes those among them who have tried to do it. For most suicides are frightful frustrations. Someone who has attempted to shoot himself through the head succeeds only in severing the optic nerve and making himself blind. Someone else, who has thought of going to sleep after poisoning himself with some compound, makes a mistake in measuring the dose and wakes up, three days later, brain liquefied, memory gone, limbs paralyzed. Suicide is an art that does not permit mediocrity nor amateurism, and which, moreover, by its very

nature does not allow the acquisition of experience.

This experience, if, as we believe, the problem interests you, we are ready to put at your disposal. Proprietors of a hotel situated at the frontier of the United States and Mexico, freed of all troublesome control by the desert-like character of the region, we have believed it our duty to offer to those of our fellow-men who, for serious and irrefutable reasons, wish to quit this life, the means of doing it without suffering and, we almost dare write, without danger.

At the Thanatos Palace Hotel, death will come in your sleep and in the most peaceful manner. Our skillful technique, acquired in the course of fifteen years of uninterrupted success (we received more than 2000 visitors last year), permits us to guarantee a minute dose and immediate results. We may also add that, for clients affected by legitimate religious scruples, we put an end to things by an ingenious method, and, if you honor us by turning to us, relieve you of all moral responsibility.

It is important to add that Thanatos is situated in a region of great natural beauty, that it has four tennis courts, an eighteen-hole golf course, and a beautiful swimming pool. Its clientele being composed of persons of both sexes who almost all belong to a refined social milieu, the social delights of the sojourn are incomparable. Travel-

ers are requested to get off at Deeming, where the hotel automobile will meet them. They are asked to announce their arrival by letter or cable at least two days in advance. As for the fee, the sum of \$300 will cover your entire expenses. . . .

The hotel was built in Spanish-Indian style, very low, with terraced roof and red walls of a cement crudely simulating clay. The rooms faced south on an open vista, streets like those of a great city, flower-lined boulevards.

Henry Boerstecher, the manager, was a quiet man with gold-rimmed glasses, very proud of his establishment.

"The hotel belongs to you?" asked Jean Monnier.

"No. The hotel belongs to a corporation, but it was my idea, and I am manager for life."

"And how is it that you don't have the gravest difficulties with the local authorities?"

"Difficulties?" said Mr. Boerstecher, surprised and shocked. "But we do nothing that is contrary to our duties as hotel-keepers. We give our clients what they want, everything they want, nothing more. Besides, there is no local authority here. The boundary is so loosely defined in this territory that no one knows exactly what is Mexico and what the United States."

"And the families of your clients never prosecute you?"

"Prosecute us!" exclaimed Mr.

Boerstecher indignantly. "And why, in heaven's name? In what court? The families of our clients are only too happy to see liquidated without publicity affairs that are delicate and at the same time almost always painful. Would you like to see your room? It will be, if you really wish it, Room 113. You are not superstitious?"

"Not at all," said Jean Monnier. "But in this connection, I ought to tell you that I have been reared religiously and that the idea of suicide is repugnant to me."

"It is not a question of suicide," said Mr. Boerstecher in a tone so peremptory that his interlocutor did not insist. "Sarconi, you will show Mr. Monnier 113. As for the \$300, if you would be good enough to pay in advance in passing the cashier's office, next to mine here."

It was in vain in Room 113, bathed in a beautiful sunset, that Jean Monnier looked for traces of death-dealing machines.

"What time is dinner?"

"At eight-thirty, sir," said the valet.

"Is it necessary to dress?"

"Most of the gentlemen do, sir."

"Very well! I'll dress. Get out a black tie and white shirt."

When he went down to the lobby, he saw, indeed, that the women were in décolleté and the men in dinner jackets. Mr. Boerstecher appeared, officious but perfectly deferential.

"Ah! Mr. Monnier! I was looking

for you. Since you are alone, I thought perhaps you would find it pleasant to share your table with one of our clients, Mrs. Kerby-Shaw."

Monnier made a gesture of ennui.

"I did not come here," he said, "to lead a worldly life. However, that depends. Can you show me this lady without presenting me?"

"Certainly, Mr. Monnier. Mrs. Kerby-Shaw is the young woman in the silver-spangled gown sitting near the piano looking through a magazine. I don't think that her physical aspect can displease. Far from it. And she is an extremely pleasant woman, with good manners, intelligent, an artist."

Certainly Mrs. Kerby-Shaw was a very pretty woman. Her hair, arranged in little curls, was drawn into a low knot at the nape of her neck to reveal a high and vigorous forehead. Her eyes were soft and intelligent. Why the devil did such a charming being want to die?

"Is Mrs. Kerby-Shaw . . . that is, is that lady one of your clients on the same terms and for the same reason as I?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Boerstecher, and he seemed to charge the adverb with a heavy significance. "Certainly."

"Then present me."

After dinner Jean Monnier spent the entire evening in a small deserted salon, whispering words to Claire Kerby-Shaw which seemed to move her. Before going up to his

room, he sought out Mr. Boerstecher. He found the manager in his office, a large black register open before him. Mr. Boerstecher was checking his accounts, and, from time to time, with a stroke of a red pencil, he struck out a line.

"Good evening, Mr. Monnier. Can I do something for you?"

"Yes, Mr. Boerstecher. . . . At least I hope so. . . . What I have to say is going to be a surprise. . . . Such a sudden change . . . but that is the way life is. . . . In short, I have come to tell you I don't want to die."

Mr. Boerstecher raised his eyes.  
"Are you serious, Mr. Monnier?"

"I know very well," said the Frenchman, "that I am going to seem incoherent and indecisive. But isn't it natural that if circumstances change, your desires also change? Eight days ago, when I received your letter, I felt desperate, alone in the world. I didn't think life's struggle was worth the trouble to be enterprising. Today everything is changed. And fundamentally, thanks to you."

"Thanks to me, Mr. Monnier?"

"Yes, because the young woman whom you seated across from me at the table is the one who has performed the miracle. Mrs. Kerby-Shaw is a delightful woman."

"I told you so, Mr. Monnier."

"Delightful and heroic. Told of my miserable situation, she really wanted to accept and to share it. Does that surprise you?"

"Not in the least. We are used to these sudden changes here. And I am glad, Mr. Monnier. You are young."

"There remains only the settlement of a rather delicate question. The \$300 which I have advanced and which constitutes almost all I have in the world, has it been irrevocably paid over to Thanatos, or may I, to buy our tickets, recover a part?"

"We are honest people, Mr. Monnier. Tomorrow morning the cashier's office will prepare your bill. The remainder will be returned."

"You are most courteous and generous. Ah! Mr. Boerstecher, what gratitude I owe you! Happiness rediscovered! A new life!"

"At your service," said Mr. Boerstecher.

He watched Jean Monnier make his exit and disappear. Then he pressed a button and said:

"Send me Sarconi."

After several minutes the porter appeared.

"You asked for me, Signor Manager?"

"Yes, Sarconi. It will be necessary to turn on the gas in 113 this evening . . . about two o'clock in the morning."

As the porter went out, Mrs. Kerby-Shaw appeared at the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Boerstecher. "I was about to call you. Your young and charming client has just been in to announce his impending departure."

"It seems to me," she said, "that I deserve compliments. That was quick work."

"Very quick. I have taken that into account."

"Then it is set for tonight?"

"It is set for tonight."

"Poor boy," she said. "He was sweet, romantic".

"They are all romantic."

"All the same, you are cruel," she said. "It's exactly at the moment when they regain a taste for life that you do away with them."

"Cruel? On the contrary, it is in that that the humanity of our method lies."

He consulted his register.

"Tomorrow, rest, but day after

tomorrow I have a new arrival for you. It's another banker, but a Swede this time. And this one is no longer very young."

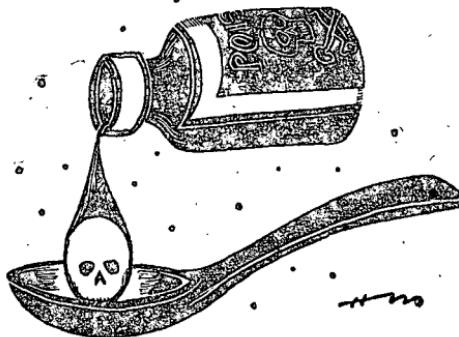
"I really liked the little Frenchman," she said, dreamily.

"One doesn't choose one's work," said the manager severely. "Here, here are your ten dollars, plus a two-dollar premium."

"Thank you," said Claire Kerby-Shaw.

As she placed the bills in her bag, she sighed.

When she had gone, Boerstecher looked for his red pencil. Then, carefully, using a little metal ruler, he struck a name from his register. . . .



# George Harmon Coxe

## Going My Way?

*The human interest story of a truck driver, his girl, and a hitch-hiker—honest, straightforward, and with fine characterizations . . . by one of the real "pros" in the mystery field.*

THE HOT BLACK COFFEE MADE ME feel a little better and I had a second cup while Steve was filling the thermos and making my ham-and-cheese on white. He acted sort of patronizing about that sandwich.

"You gettin' soft or something?" he asked as he wrapped it and shoved it down the counter. "Where's your helper? You goin' it alone?"

I told him I was and kept sipping my coffee.

"Thirty-five," Steve said. "And was I you I'd take it easy with that sandwich."

I knew what he meant. On a long haul it's poor business to eat anything after the first few hours. It makes you sleepy, and sleep is a truck driver's worst enemy. I know because I was following right behind Shorty Bates last year when he hit the side of an overhead crossing and about five tons of lumber slapped him in the back.

So we don't each much. We drink coffee and chew caffein tablets. Steve's advice was good, all right, but I didn't want to explain the

sandwich wasn't for me, so I paid him and said: "I've never gone to sleep yet."

"If you had"—Steve waved his counter rag—"you wouldn't be here. Stay smart."

Outside it was cool and damp, and there was a smell in the air of a storm on its way. Three trucks—a Red-Ball and two Twi-States—were parked in the flood-lighted corral next to the bunkhouse, the protecting glare of the bulbs and reflectors making thick shadows that exaggerated their size.

Madge was still sleeping in her corner of the seat, and after twelve hours of it she still looked swell, with her face shadowed a little by the dim glow of the dash light, and something soft and warm reflecting from the whiteness of her throat. Madge wasn't the fragile fluffy type, but she looked it now. I'd never seen her asleep before and I got a kick out of just looking at her. Somehow, it gave me another angle on marriage; and the idea of being able to see her this-way often made me feel pretty good.

She did not wake up when I

started the motor, just hunched a little lower in the corner and burrowed the side of her chin in the fur collar of her coat. After I got straightened out on the road I thought about getting an arm around her. I wanted to hold her, have her lean on me. But it was only a thought. You can't drive one of these babies one-handed. I paid attention to the road.

The stretch was straight and flat here. My steady 30 pulled the white lane of concrete back into the headlights in an endless ribbon, and I got to thinking, like I always do, about Madge and my job, and how long it would be before we saved up the extra \$500.

If things had gone right we would have been married by now. We had planned it all last year. How much money we wanted to start off with, and how we were going to get it. Only Madge got sick and lost her job as stenographer, and left me to do the saving. I wanted to get married anyway and live with my folks for a while. But Madge said no. We'd wait until we could have a decent honeymoon and pay cash for the furniture and have a place of our own. That's why I gave up my day run and took this long-haul job. More overtime and more money.

At that it was a grind, trying to build up the \$500 she said we needed. Sometimes I guess I got a little bitter about it, wondering whether getting married was worth the

struggle. Maybe it would be a struggle after we were married. But there would be some fun, too. This way it was all one-sided. Madge home, and me away most of the time on account of the schedule. Once I tried to figure out how many miles I'd have to drive before we saved the money; but I got discouraged when I began to see how slowly those miles unrolled.

A bump, where the concrete ended and the macadam began, woke Madge up. I looked over and she was watching me, her eyes shiny and smiling, her lips moist. For a minute or so she just sat there, still drowsy and hating to move, then she yawned like a contented kitten and sat up. I forgot about the miles. If someone had offered me what I wanted most in the next minute I'd have taken a kiss and been grateful.

Madge arched her back and stared out of her side of the cab into the darkness. When she looked back at me her smile was gone. She asked me where we were and I told her.

"How much longer?" she wanted to know.

"An hour and a half to New London," I told her. "Two or two and a half to Providence and then you can get out and stretch because I've got to do some unloading."

She looked at her wrist-watch, moving towards me and bending over so she could see the tiny hands

in the dash light. "And how long from there to Boston?"

"Another two hours."

"It's a quarter after 12," she said dryly. "We won't get in until after 5."

I pushed the thermos and the sandwich towards her. "You'll feel better after you get rid of this."

I got a surprise then. She sat up straight and said, "You stopped!" with an accusing sort of tone, as though I'd doublecrossed her.

"Sure I stopped," I said. Maybe I was a little snappy because I thought she'd be glad to get the coffee and would act like she appreciated the sandwich.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought you'd want all the sleep you could get. I fix it so you get sleep and food too and you crab."

"Well—" she picked at the waxed paper around the sandwich, her eyes following a sedan that flashed past and cut in front of me. "You might have told me."

We got back on a straight stretch of concrete and I lit a cigarette. I knew what she was irritated about. She hadn't intended to go to sleep: she didn't want to go to sleep. But she had and that made her sore.

You see, on this sort of run there would be some weeks when I'd only get home two or three nights, and that didn't give me much chance to take her to the movies. Lots of times I'd be so tired I'd go to sleep on her when I did take her

out, and that was not so glamorous. She knew *why* I was like I was, doing this sort of work, but she hadn't felt the pain of needing sleep, the ache of fighting it when it pulled at your eyelids and your brain was drugged by the droning lullaby of the motor until you saw things on the road that weren't there. To her sleep was just a habit.

I think she came along with me to find out for herself. She wanted to visit an uncle in Boston, and she got the idea that this would be an interesting way of doing it. Besides, she argued, it would save the \$3.00 bus fare, wouldn't it? So I fixed it with my boss and here we were.

The truck is a sleeper cab. Not a real modern one, but there is a rough bunk in a sort of little trough behind the seat, with ventilator shutters in each end at the sides of the truck. Red, my helper, could get two or three hours of sleep a night that way and we could keep rolling without too much risk.

I looked over at Madge. She was eating half of the sandwich and sipping coffee from the top of the thermos.

She didn't look at me; I wasn't feeling very sympathetic right then anyway. Because a while back I'd been sorry for her and had tried to get her to crawl over in the bunk and grab a few winks. But she got proud or stubborn or something and wouldn't do it. Now I told myself it was a good thing because after this when I said I needed

some sleep maybe she'd know what I meant. And maybe she'd have some idea of what it was like to wrestle a truck for twenty-four hours.

She couldn't know about the cramps that got into the calves of your legs, or the aching stiffness that spread from your back and crept up through your neck and shoulders. But she'd have a taste of it. Just sitting is no picnic. After a while a truck seat gets like one in the bleachers at the end of a double-header. No soft spots any place.

At that, it had been an easy trip. We'd got started about 1 o'clock that noon, and we'd get through between 6 and 7 in the morning. Only about eighteen hours on the road. You can't kick at that. Plenty of times Red and I've been twenty-four hours on the road and 35 on duty, with nothing but a couple winks behind the seat.

"Here. You want some?"

I looked around. She was getting ready to pour some coffee into the thermos top.

"Go ahead," I told her. "It's for you. I had some."

"We'll save it then," she said, and put in the cork and screwed on the top.

I didn't argue because we were starting up a hill and I knew I'd have three shifts to make before I got over the top. Halfway up we were crawling and I had plenty of time to look around. Below and to the right was the Sound. You

couldn't make out the shore line, but you knew what you saw was water. It was blacker than night, and flat, and a dampness floated up from that direction and chilled the air. I think we could have smelled the sea except for the truck, but all I got was the exhaust and the roar of the engine.

I saw the fellow when I looked back at the road. He was about a hundred yards ahead of us and the headlights made him look small and hunched as he climbed. I waited, sort of holding my breath, and sure enough Madge crashed through.

"Why don't you give him a lift?"

I blew out my breath and said nothing for a minute. I counted them. This was the fifth guy she'd wanted to pick up. The first was just a suggestion, but the argument got stronger every time.

"I've already told you," I said. "I don't give anybody a lift. It's orders."

"Orders," she sniffed. And then, to make it tougher, this guy gives me the thumb.

Going slow like we were, it took us a long time to catch up with him and I could see he was young, and not a bad-looking kid. His clothes were fairly decent, too. I really wanted to stop. I've felt that way before. But I like my job. And I almost lost it once when one of the big shots in the office saw me pull into a checking station with an old guy I'd picked up outside of Scran-

ton. I was lucky to get by with a bawling out because the rules say: *No Pickups!*

You can't blame the company. Ten thousand is nothing for a truck like this. And when I get soft-hearted I think about Madge and how bad I want to get married; and about Lefty Conlon and Sam Spurk. Lefty picked up a guy and got a gun in his side while three other punks came up and ran off with the truck; Sam got kidnaped for a few hours while some hoods got rid of his load.

"How would you like it, walking all night?" Madge asked, disdainful-like. "You'd want a ride wouldn't you?"

"I would," I said, "but I wouldn't expect to get it. Not at this time of night."

"To hear you the whole thing is a racket and every man on the road wants to run off with your truck."

"Listen," I said. Sort of irritably I guess, because here I was being hard—we were just passing the hitchhiker and I could see the sort of hurt disappointment on his face—and trying to hold down my job and having to argue with Madge to justify myself.

"I know the orders," I went on. "I run into this same thing every night. Only you're not here and I don't have to get bawled out for it. So make out you're not here. Suppose I get caught making a pickup? Suppose I lose my job. Swell,

huh? And anyway, whose idea was it, your coming along?"

"I thought you'd like to have me," Madge said and her voice sounded stiff, throaty:

"That's what I thought," I said. "But if you don't like my routine, let it go. I'll get back my day run and we'll wait."

"I don't want to wait," she said and moved up against me and slipped her arm through mine. I melted at that, and then she spoiled it all by tacking on a little more. "Only—I can't help feeling sorry for them. I hope the boy wasn't sick."

I had a crack on the tip of my tongue but I smothered it. She was no shrew, Madge, but every once in a while she'd get on a tear about something and then it was hard to change her mind. She was that capable, big-hearted kind and I had an idea she'd be a little bossy after we were married. But I didn't think I'd mind because I figured she'd be good around the house; good with kids, too. I was glad I didn't say anything. I guess we were both tired—maybe tired of waiting for something that seemed a long time in coming.

It began to drizzle and I started the windshield wiper. We went on without speaking for another couple miles, and then I saw this guy plodding along ahead of us. This time, after the row and everything, I didn't think she'd say anything. A fellow would have kept his

mouth shut, knowing how I felt about it. Maybe she was thinking about the kid we passed. I don't know the reason but she went ahead with it.

Her hand tightened on my arm and she said, "Listen, Joe," in that confidential mother-knows-best manner, "I've never been so very wrong before, have I? It's raining and he hasn't even got a coat."

I had no intention of stopping, but right then and there something hot and angry flared up inside of me. What was the sense of working nights, and eating caffenin tablets and aching for sleep if it meant being miserable and quarreling. Before I knew it I said, "Okay," and slipped into neutral.

"Oh." That's all she said but there was a lot of pleased thanks in her voice. I couldn't tell whether she was proud of me, or tickled silly because she'd had her way and I was breaking regulations.

I braked down, and I could see now that this new fellow was small and thin, and that he didn't expect a lift. He hadn't bothered to turn around.

"I hope I get fired for it. I hope this guy pulls a gun and makes us walk in, and then maybe you'll keep your nose out of my business."

That's what I said, and at the time I meant it, I was that sore. Madge took time to look around at me and her dark eyes were narrowed and angry and hurt. She

said, "Joe Martin. You ought to be ashamed," and then she flounced around on the seat and looked at our customer as the truck stopped.

Well, this guy was surprised, all right. Maybe because I stopped, and maybe because he looked up and saw Madge hanging out looking at him. She had to tell him to get in, and when she pushed over on the seat she whispered, "Now don't be nasty to him either."

A car swung around a curve up ahead, spotlighted us. I hoped it wasn't a stockholder of the company or a friend of the boss when I shifted; then I took a look at our passenger. His clothes were a network of wrinkles and the rain glistened on his shapeless felt hat. His face was thin and very white and tired-looking except for the gray eyes which were shrewd and bright and kind of wary; not what you'd expect in a pickup like this. I remembered about the eyes later.

"Well," he said when he got settled. "Well, this is fine. Mighty nice of you. So many trucks passed me I didn't think you'd stop. At night and all. Appreciate it, though."

"You would have been wet through if you had gone on much longer," Madge said, her voice warm and friendly. "How far are you going?"

"Far as I can."

"Well, we're going to Boston." She gave me a quick, superior glance that seemed like an effort to mock my suspicions.

Nobody spoke for a minute or so and then he said, talking to Madge, "I'd never expect to find anyone like you on a truck. Are you—is he your husband?"

"No," Madge said, "that is, not yet." And then, ignoring me to keep me in my place, she went on to tell him all about it, giving it to him from start to finish. She had a good listener and I guess it was a story she liked to hear and talk about. There was something triumphant and maybe a little proud in the way she went on. She even repeated herself when she explained that I didn't have to be making these overnight trips but that I was doing it so we could save money and get married that much quicker.

I didn't say anything because I was still sore; and I stayed sore because she had been right and everything had turned out okay. Besides, it burned me to see her being so confidential to a stranger.

For the next few minutes I paid attention to my job while we went through New London. When we had crossed the bridge I took a quick look at this fellow.

I could see now that he wasn't a bad little guy. Tucked off in the corner with one hand in his coat pocket, he was quiet and kind and helpless-looking and appreciative of the ride. I began to feel a little sheepish about it. Madge was right again. She usually was. And I had an idea I'd hear about this thing,

the rest of my life probably, whenever Madge could use it as an illustration to win an argument.

After a while Madge began to question him. He answered her, too. Not always right away, but he answered. Edward Wainright, he said his name was. That sounded familiar, although I couldn't place it.

"How far are you going?" Madge asked him.

"Well," he said, hesitating a little, "I'd like to get into Canada." And then Madge came out with a typical woman's question.

"Why?"

That stopped him for a minute. When he finally answered he said, "Well, the police are looking for me, I'm supposed to be in prison but I had a bit of luck."

He spoke quietly, simply, like a man commenting on the weather, but he couldn't have jarred me more if he'd shouted. I thought, "Well, here goes the job and everything else," while my nerves tightened up like violin strings.

He kept on talking in that quiet, weary tone, but I knew right then who he was. You don't get to read the papers regularly on a job like this: Still I knew something about him.

He had killed a man named Tabor who had been bothering his wife. I think a real good lawyer could have got him off with self-defense but as it was they gave him five to eight years. And then he

had escaped while a deputy was taking him from the courthouse. I could see why now. Because he looked so docile and harmless. This deputy, underrating him, had put one cuff on him and was holding the other. Wainright tripped the deputy and jerked the cuff from the fellow's hand. He was small, he was lucky to lose himself in the crowd until he could steal a car.

"You see," Wainright explained, "I've had a lot of tough luck these past three years. Sickness. No job. Lost my house. Ruth, that's my wife, was the only one that brought in any money.

"She shouldn't have worked at all because of her lungs, but she was a good stenographer and she made 30 a week at it. I tried to get her to take the few hundred we had and go West, to Arizona or New Mexico and see if we couldn't make some sort of a living while her lungs got strong. But she was afraid to give up her job—and it was a long time before I found out that in order to keep working she had to put up with a lot of offensive attention from her boss, this Tabor.

"Well, the details don't matter. Anyway, I came back to our place one night. I heard her scream as I reached for the door-knob, and they were still struggling when I went in. I guess it looked worse than it was because Ruth had been fighting so hard her hair was down and the sleeve of her dress was torn."

Wainright paused and looked at me. I could see that his eyes were hard and metallic, and didn't fit his face.

"Maybe you know how I felt. Ruth tried to smooth it over. Tabor was a—well, arrogant, disdainful. He was twice as big as I am and when I told him to get out he laughed. There was a gun in a table drawer and I grabbed it. To get him out, that's all; to get him out so Ruth wouldn't see him laugh at me. He started for me and he was ugly. When he grabbed me I pulled the trigger."

Wainright looked away and his voice was apologetic. "I suppose it was a fool thing to do. I don't seem to regret it—about Tabor. I do when I think of what Ruth went through. What money we had went for the lawyer. I knew she'd never get West. She had luck enough to get another job while I was waiting trial and she wouldn't give it up. She had to live, she said; and I'd need things in prison.

"I really had no intention of trying to escape. The thought just came to me while I was walking with that jailer." Wainright moved his free hand in a shrugging gesture. "My luck held. I've seen Ruth. We talked things over and she wanted me to go back, said she'd wait for me. I didn't tell her I thought she'd be dead before I was free.

"They've got a reward out for me, but I decided to take a chance,

and well, my luck is still holding. I guess you can see what this ride means."

We went on for about five miles with nobody saying a word. The lights of a passing car flashed briefly into the cab. Twice my eyes slid towards Wainright and I jerked them back. I was beginning to get scared but I couldn't miss the irony of the set-up: Madge had her way; I had my angry wish—except that I'd picked up a murderer instead of a gunman. And here we were, riding side by side. It was Madge who spoke first.

"How far have you come today?"

"Well," Wainright said awkwardly, as though we had a right to know but he didn't want to tell, "I've been going since 5 o'clock."

"You'll have to keep going after you leave us, too," Madge said. "Why don't you lie down in back of the seat for a while. There's a place and—"

Her voice trailed off, and when I looked at her, her face was white.

Wainright kept right on surprising me. He said he guessed he would, and climbed over the seat, stretched out on his side. Madge shoved over towards me then, but she didn't say a word. Neither did I. I just did a lot of thinking in a very short time while the whining suck of tires on the wet concrete and the rumble of the truck droned out a weird accompaniment.

By that time I was plenty scared;

scared in a nervous, jittery way because I didn't know what was coming next. Sort of panick like one time I was swimming a long way from shore and something brushed up against my leg. I didn't think this guy would hurt Madge, and I didn't have room for any "I told you so" thoughts. I don't know what worried me most, my truck and my job—or Wainright.

The guy's loony, I thought. But that didn't comfort me any. I couldn't figure his attitude, or why he told us his story. And he kept one hand in his pocket. I didn't like that either, although there was no kick in the way he'd been behaving. The whole thing was a headache, screwy. It didn't make sense.

I kept worrying about all these things until I got the germ of an idea which began to blossom of its own accord. I got to thinking about the reward.

I didn't know how much it was, but I told myself it must be at least 500. And it seemed worth a try when I thought of how sick I was of this night and day job, and seeing Madge once or twice a week and the rest of the time thinking how much I wanted her and how long I had to wait. One half of my brain argued that way; the other half argued: This guy has had enough tough breaks. You'd be a heel to turn him in.

Well, telling myself I'd be a heel only made me try to justify myself. After all, this guy had killed a man.

He had been convicted and who was I to say the sentence wasn't just? Certainly the yarn he'd given us was prejudiced.

Somebody would get him anyway, I argued, so why not me? My story would be that he was hiding in the truck, that I didn't pick him up. And it shouldn't be too tough. He was a little fellow and I thought I could take him with one hand.

When I remembered my blackjack I began to get confident. It wasn't a blackjack really; it was more like a policeman's night stick. I had it for emergencies and it was in a little holder fastened to the front, upright part of the seat beside my right leg. A quick little crack with that, not too hard a crack, and . . .

Keeping my eyes on the road, I reached down for that club. I did it slowly, easily, while the tires sucked wetly on the concrete and the strident whine of the windshield wiper topped the rumble of the truck: vague faraway sounds submerged by the pounding of my heart. My fingers slid along the polished surface of the handle and suddenly my nerves tightened up on me and I was sweating and scared again. Then I felt a hand on my wrist. Madge's hand.

I held steady for a moment or so, tensed, holding my breath. I don't think she knew about that stick, but something must have told her what was in my mind, what I was up to. She kept holding my wrist,

her hand soft and hot, until I let go of the stick and reached for the wheel.

I glanced over at her. She still looked stiff-lipped and she shook her head the least bit, her dark eyes round and wide with some inner disturbance.

I exhaled, relaxed. And now that she'd made up our minds, damned if I wasn't glad. I felt relieved, sort of buoyant inside. I knew now that it would have been a crummy trick after he had trusted us with his story.

When we started through Providence I knew I'd have to tell Wainright to get out before we got to the warehouse. I was wondering how to say it when he sat up on the bunk, told me to pull off my regular route and go down a side street.

I got sort of cold all over and began to curse myself for not slugging him when I had the chance. I made the turn and was thinking, "Here's where the stick-up comes," when he said, still speaking softly:

"I guess I can give you the rest of the story now. I'm not going to Canada; I'm getting out here. I was going to look up a fellow I know to do the job, but I think you'll do even better because I'm not sure I can trust him."

I kept driving without saying a word.

"That reward adds up to \$3,000 now," he went on, "and I figured out a plan when I talked with

Ruth. I want that reward—or part of it. I've got to have it for her. \$2,000 will be enough to keep her out West for two years if she lives simply. And two years in that climate will mend her lungs. That's all I want. The other thousand is your share if you take me in."

Even then I didn't know what the score was, I didn't believe him. I just sat there slack-jawed, driving automatically. When I could think it was, "Now I know he's loony." I finally said, "I don't like it."

"I don't blame you," Wainright said. "It sounds crooked. But look at it my way. They want me. They're willing to pay. I'm broke. I'll never get away, and I don't want to. But somebody will collect that reward. Probably a bunch of cops."

He climbed over on the seat. I was in too much of a fog to say anything. I just sat there with my palms damp on the wheel, not knowing I was holding my breath until I blew it out.

"It's a cinch, really. Say I stuck you up." Wainright pulled a heavy-looking automatic out of his pocket and I knew I'd guessed right about that anyway. "And I got careless and you jumped me. You can't lose your job that way, and you can make twice the 500 you need."

"How do you know I won't hold out the whole 3,000," I stalled, concentrating on keeping my voice flat.

"You won't," Wainright said.

"I've been sizing you up. I like your girl. She's honest. When I heard you needed money, too, I decided to risk my story. I had to be sure. That's why I played meek and got in back—to give you a chance to jump me."

"Suppose I had," I said, and my voice was stiff, like my muscles.

"I had the drop on you all the time." Wainright waved the gun. "I might not have shot you, but I'd dumped you out and taken the truck until I got clear. Then I would have tried to make it here and looked up the fellow I told you about. But the two of you are better than he is. And you played square with me. How about it? Make up your mind."

I saw the green lights of a police station two blocks ahead, and then I remembered that this was the town where Wainright had lived and been arrested. The sweat came out on my forehead. I couldn't make myself say either yes or no. I mumbled, "Well—" and that seemed to be enough for Wainright.

"Get a story and stick to it," he hurried on. "I'm bringing you right to the station so you won't have to split that money with the police. When you collect, \$2,000 goes to my wife. I'll give you a letter later." His voice got sharp, incisive. "Promise now, both of you!"

Madge and I said, "I promise!" in a sort of mechanical chorus.

He gave me the automatic, and

even then if he'd started blasting I'd have been no more surprised. And then I knew I had to go through with it. I stopped in front of the station house and we went up the steps with the gun in Wainright's back and Madge tagging behind me.

There was a uniformed officer sitting behind the dais-like desk, and a chubby fellow with a freckled face and glasses lounging against the rail.

Wainright said, "Hello, Lieutenant," wearily.

The fellow looked up, stared at Wainright; then at me and the gun. He put down his pen and leaned back in the chair and finally grinned.

"Well, well," he said. "Hello, Eddy. Welcome home. Where you been keeping yourself?"

The freckle-faced fellow bounded off the rail. "What the—" he flung out. "What—" His eyes widened behind his glasses and his face folded up in a grin. "Boy," he breathed, "is this gonna be something." He stepped over to me. "I'm Malloy, of *The Leader*. What's the story?"

I gave it to him. At first I was stiff-lipped and jumpy, but I improved as I went along; I turned

on the innocence and kept talking fast so he couldn't interrupt. When I wound up I had things under control and I made my voice hard. "Just remember that there's a reward and that I brought this guy in alone."

Malloy's hand came up in a confident gesture. "I'll remember." He turned and grinned at the Lieutenant who was looking kind of sour. "It'll be a pleasure."

Two plainclothesmen came in and took Wainright and the gun. Malloy grabbed a phone and the Lieutenant steered us into a little anteroom and left us alone. The moment the door closed Madge was in my arms. She pulled my head down and clung to me, hard. I held her tight because suddenly I was shaky again. We stood there like that, not talking, for quite a while. Then I did what I'd wanted to do—about three months ago, it seemed—after we'd left Steve's.

Wainright's wife is living out in Arizona while he serves out his term.

I guess it was a good break in some other ways, too. I'm on a day run now, and Madge and I like married life. She's boss around the house, and I do the driving.

"Q"

# Helen Simpson

## A Posteriori

*The late Helen Simpson was equally at home writing historical novels, fantasies, and (with Clemence Dane) detective stories. Here is another facet of Helen Simpson's talent—a humorous spy story about a fastidious British spinster who had an extraordinary adventure during a visit to France. In a recent letter from Helen Simpson's husband, he wrote: "this story amused many people and shocked others."*

AT ABOUT 1 o'clock on the last night of her stay in Pontdierles-Dames, Miss Agatha Charters was awakened by indeterminate noises sounding almost in her room, and a medley of feet and voices in the street. It was not the first time this had happened. Pontdier had belied the promise, made by an archdeacon, that she would find it a harbor of calm. The fact was, the town was too near a frontier, and too unsophisticated. When politicians in Paris began to roar of treason, Pontdier believed them, and the Town Council set up a hue and cry for spies. Miss Charters had not failed to observe this nervousness, and to despise it a little, without ill-humor; but to be roused at one in the morning was a little too much, and she said so, in her firm French, to the landlady as she paid her bill the next day before leaving.

*"Je ne suis pas sûre que je puis vous recommander à mes amis. Vo-*

*tre ville n'est pas tranquille du tout.*

The landlady sank her head between her shoulders, then raised and swung it deplorably to and fro.

"Las' naight," said the landlady, practising English, which reckoned as a commercial asset, "it is a man escape from the police. A spy that makes photographs. They at-trape him, but the photographs—gone! Nobody know."

"*Un espion!*" repeated Miss Charters coldly, as one who had heard that tale before. "*Espérons qu'il n'échapper à pas.*"

With that she walked upstairs to her room for a final inspection. Her hot-water bottle, as usual, had been forgotten in the deeps of the bed, and this she rescued thankfully. Going to the washstand to empty it, she set her foot on some round object and came to the floor with no inconsiderable bump. The object, obeying the impetus she had

given it, rolled to rest against a hair-leg, and Miss Charters, turning to eye it with the natural remsentment of one tricked by the intimate, instantly recognized it as a spool of film.

Her mind, with a gibbon-like agility, leaped from the spool to the noises in the night; linked these with her own wide-open window, probably the only one in the entire façade of the hotel; and came to the conclusion that this spool had reached her floor by the hand of the suspected spy now in custody —flung as he fled. But there had been, her subconscious seemed to think, *two* noises in the room. She looked for another possible missile, and perceived, under the bed, a flat wallet of some kind. It was quite inaccessible, the bed's frame hung low, she had no umbrella to rake for it, and some vague memory of criminal procedure insisted that the police must always have first cut at a clue. It was her duty to go downstairs, display to the landlady the spool, which she had picked up instinctively, and ask that the authorities should be informed.

She set foot on the stairs, and even as she did so, halted. It became apparent that she would have to give her evidence in person, swear to the noise in the night and to the morning's discovery. This would involve missing her train, and its subsequent connection, with the expense of warning domestics and relatives by telegram. More sin-

ister considerations succeeded these. The French were hysterical. They were spy-conscious. They would refuse to believe that she and the fleeing man were strangers. As an excuse for open windows, a plea of fresh air would not satisfy.

Halting on the stairs, she rehearsed these reasons for holding her tongue, and came to the conclusion that silence, with a subsequent letter from England, would meet the case. To roll the spool under the bed until it lay near the wallet, and so depart, would be the dignified and comparatively honest course of action. But the turmoil of the morning had let loose in Miss Charters's mind hordes of revolutionary desires, which now found a rallying ground in the fact that she had not, in her 40-odd years, had one single unusual experience. She had never held unquestioned sway as chief talker at any party; she had never come within hail of being the heroine of any incident more lively than the spoiling of a Guide picnic by rain. The spool of film, now safe in her bag, tempted her; to take it home as proof of the adventure, to hand it over in the end, perhaps, to somebody from the Foreign Office or Scotland Yard! She hesitated, and the revolutionaries in that instant had her conscience down. No word of any discovery found its way into her farewells.

At the station she became aware of two things. First, that she had

twenty minutes to wait for her train; second, that amid the excitements of the morning she had omitted a visit to that retreat which old-fashioned foreign hotels leave innominate, indicating it only by two zeros on the door. She cast a prudish but searching eye about her. The word *Dames* beckoned; Miss Charters bought a newspaper and, apparently purposeless, drifted towards it.

The usual uncleanness greeted her, and to protect herself from unspeakable contacts, Miss Charters sacrificed a whole sheet of her newspaper. It was newly printed, the ink had a bloom to it. Miss Charters, accustomed at home to entrust to newspapers the defense of musquash against moth, vaguely supposed that it might prove, on this analogy, deterrent to germs. She emerged without delay, glanced to see that her baggage was safe, and paced up and down reading what remained of *Le Petit Journal*. There were fifteen minutes still to wait.

Seven or eight of these had passed in the atmosphere of unhurried makeshift that pervades all minor French stations when a commotion was heard outside, chattering of motorcycles, and shouting. Through the door marked *Sortie*, three policemen in khaki and képis made a spectacular entrance, followed by a miraculous crowd apparently started up from the paving-stones. The three advanced up-

on Miss Charters, innocently staring, and required her, none too civilly, to accompany them.

"*Pourquoi?*" she inquired without heat. "*Je vais manquer mon train?*"

They insisted, not politely; and their explanations, half inarticulate, contained a repetition of the word *portefeuille*. At once Miss Charters understood; the wallet had been found. (Who would have thought the French swept so promptly under beds?) She must give her account of the whole matter, miss her connection, telegraph her relations. Bells and signals announced the train to be nearly due; with a brief click of the tongue she summoned resolution for a last attempt at escape.

"*Je suis anglaise,*" she announced. "*Mon passeport est en ordre. Voulez-vous voir?*"

She opened her bag, and immediately, with a swift fatal motion, made to shut it. On top, surmounting the handkerchief, the eau-de-Cologne, the passport, lay the damning red spool, so hurriedly, so madly crammed in. The foremost policeman saw it as soon as she did. He gave a "Ha!" of triumph, and snatched the bag away from her. His two companions fell in at her side, the crowd murmured and eddied like a stream swollen by flood. As she was marched from the station, out of the corner of an eye she saw the train come in; and as they entered the Grande Rue she

heard the chuff and chug of its departure. Hope gone, she could give undivided attention to her plight.

It became evident, from the manner of the policemen, and from the fact that she was taken to the Hotel de Ville, that matters were serious. She made one attempt to get her bag; certain necessary words were lacking in the formula of defense she was composing, and the bag contained a pocket dictionary. Her request was denied. A cynical-looking man at a large desk—mayor? magistrate?—fanned away her protests with both hands and listened to the policeman. So did Miss Charters, and was able to gather from his evidence that the wallet found in her room contained papers and calculations to do with the aerodrome near by. Could anything be more unlucky? The one genuine spy who had ever frequented Pont-didier-les-Dames must needs throw his ill-gotten information into her bedroom!

The functionary asked at last what she had to say. She replied with the truth; and despite a vocabulary eking out with "*vous savez*" told her story well. The functionary noted her explanation without comment, and having done so, asked the inevitable, the unanswerable questions.

"You found these objects at 10:45 this morning. Why did you not immediately inform the police? You insist that they have nothing to do with you. Yet you were actually

attempting to carry out of this country one of the objects. How do you account for these facts?"

Miss Charters accounted for them by a recital, perfectly true, of her desire to shine at tea parties. It sounded odd as she told it: but she had some notion that the French were a nation of psychologists, also that, being foreign, they were gullible, and sympathetic to women in distress. The cynical man listened, and when her last appeal went down in a welter of failing syntax, considered a while, then spoke:

"I regret, mademoiselle. All this is not quite satisfactory. You must be searched."

The French she had learned at her governess's knee had not included the word he employed, and it was without any real understanding of his intention that she accompanied a woman in black, who suddenly appeared at her side, looking scimitars. They progressed together, a policeman at the other elbow, to a small room smelling of mice. The policeman shut the door on them; the woman in black ejaculated a brief command; and Miss Charters, horrified, found that she was expected to strip.

In her early youth Miss Charters's most favored day-dream had included a full-dress martyrdom, painful but effective, with subsequent conversions. She now learned that it is easier to endure pain than indignity, and amid all the throbbing which apprehension and

shame had set up in her temples, one thought lorded it: the recollection that she had not, in view of the dirty train journey, put on clean underclothes that morning.

The woman in black lifted her hands from her hips as if to help with the disrobing; there was a shuffle outside the door as though the policeman might be turning to come in. With a slight scream, Miss Charters began to unbutton, unhook, unlace her various garments; as they dropped, the woman in black explored them knowingly, with fingers as active as those of a tricoteuse. At last Miss Charters stood revealed, conscious of innocence, but finding it a poor defense, and ready to exchange the lightest of consciences for the lightest of summer vests.

The woman in black was thorough. She held stockings up to the light, pinched corsets; at last, satisfied, she cast an eye over the shrinking person of Miss Charters, twirling her slowly about. Now the words of dismissal should have come. Instead, at her back Miss Charters heard a gasp. There was an instant's silence; then the one word, ominous: "*Enfin!*"

The woman in black ran to the door and shouted through it. Miss Charters heard excitement in the policeman's answering voice, and his boots clattered off down the corridor, running. Her imagination strove, and was bested. Why? What? The woman in black, with

a grin lineally descended from '93 informed her.

"And now, my beauty, we'll see what the pretty message is that's written on mademoiselle's sit-up on!"

The next few moments were nightmare at its height, when the sleeper knows his dream for what it is, knows he must escape from it and still must abide the capricious hour of waking. An assistant in blue was vouchsafed to the woman in black. One deciphered such letters as were visible, the other took them down, pesting against the artfulness of spies who printed their messages backwards. In deference to Miss Charter's age and passport some decency was observed. Policemen waited outside the half-open door; there was much noise, but no threatening. The women heard her explanation (conjectural) of their discovery without conviction and did not even trouble to write it down.

At last the message was transcribed. The woman in blue compassionately gave Miss Charters back her clothes, a gesture countered by the woman in black, who refused to allow her to sit down lest the precious impression be blurred. With a policeman at her elbow and the two searchers at her back, her cheek-bones pink, and beset by a feeling that this pinkness ran through to her skeleton, Miss Charters once more faced the functionary across his table. The transcriber

scription was handed to him. He considered it, first through a magnifying glass, then with the aid of a mirror. The policeman, the two searchers, craned forward to know the fate of France, thus by a freak of Fortune thrust into their hands.

"*Et maintenant,*" they read in capital letters, "*j'ai du coeur au travail, grace aux PILULES PINK.*"

The functionary's eyes appeared to project. He stared at Miss Charters, at the searchers; with a start, at his own daily paper lying folded, with his gloves upon it. He tore it open, seeking. Page 7 rewarded him. *Maladies des Femmes*, said the headline; underneath, the very words that had been deciphered with such pains, accompanying an illustration of a cheerful young woman, whose outline appeared in transfer not unlike the map of a town. Silently he compared; his glass was busy. At last he looked up, and Miss Charters, meeting his eye, perceived something like comprehension in his glance, a kind of gloating, a difficult withholding of laughter—"Rabelaisian" was the word which shot across her mind like a falling star. It was a hard glance to face, but all Englishness and spunk had not been slain in Miss Charters by the indignities chance had obliged her to suffer. She had one magnificent last word:

*"Je rapporterai le W.C. de la gare aux autorités sanitaires!"*

It was the best she could do. The larger threat which at first inflamed her mind, of complaints to the Ambassador in Paris, of redress and both she and the Rabelaisian knew why. She could never, to any person, at any time, confide the truth of an experience so appalling. So far as vicarage conversation went, the thing was out of the question. Hateful irony! Something, after 40-odd years, had happened to her, and it had happened in such a manner that mere decency must strike her mute. In the words of a ceremony she had often in younger days read over fondly, she must, however difficult, hereafter forever hold her peace.

Miss Agatha Charters held it. The relations who welcomed her a day later were of opinion that her holiday in France had not done her much good. They found her quiet, and discovered that what she wanted was to be taken out of herself. So they arranged little gaieties, at which Miss Charters listened silently, now and then pinching in her lips, to travelers' tales of those who had been seeing life in London and by the sea.

"But then," as a relative remarked, "poor Aggie never did have much to say for herself."

# Ellery Queen

## I: Diamonds in Paradise

MAYBE LILI MINX WAS THE GIRL of your dreams, too. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Lili caused more insomnia in her day than all the midnight maatjes herring consumed on Broadway and 51st Street on all the opening nights put together since Jenny Lind scared the gulls off the roof of Castle Garden.

It wasn't just Lili's face and figure, either, although she could have drifted out on a bare stage before a two-bit vaudeville flat and stood there for two hours and twenty minutes just looking at you and you'd have headed for your herring mumbling "smash hit." It wasn't even her voice, which made every other set of female pipes on Broadway sound like something ground out of a box with a monkey on it. It was the trick she had of making every male within eyeshot and mike range feel that he was alone with her in a dreamboat.

Of course there was a catch, as the seven yachtsmen she married found out. With all her wonderful equipment, Lili was a mixed-up kid. She was a hopelessly incurable gambler, and she was hipped on diamonds. And the two things didn't seem to go together. Let the psychologists explain it, but the fact is money didn't mean a thing

to her. She could drop ten grand at the roulette wheel and yawn like a lady. Diamonds were another story. Let her temporarily mislay a single chip from her jewel box and she went into hysterics. Her press agent swore that she checked her inventory every night before going to bed like a kid casing his marbles.

Naturally, Lili's collection was the target of every itch-fingers out of the jug. But Lili was no push-over. When it came to her diamonds, she was like Javert in the sewers of Paris; she never gave up. The police were kept busy. They didn't mind. With La Minx on the broadcasting end of a complaint, every cop with a front porch and asthma felt like No-Hip's Lancelot, the Terror of the Underworld.

Lili's favorite gambling hell, while it lasted, was Paradise Gardens. Those were the days when New York was wide open and everything went, usually before you could come back for more. Paradise Gardens had a longer run than most. It operated behind a frowsy old brownstone front off Fifth Avenue, in the Frolicking Fifties.

The ceiling was a menace to healthy eyesight, with its glittering stars and sequinned angels; you

swallowed your buffalo steaks and cougar juice among tropical flowers under papier-mâché trees with wax apples tied onto them; and you were served by tired ex-show-girl-type waitresses wearing imitation fig leaves. So it was a relief to go upstairs where there was no mullarkey about gardens or Edens —just nice business décor and green baize-covered tables at which the management allowed you to lose your shirt or bra, as the case might be.

On this particular evening Lili Minx, being between husbands, was alone. She drifted in, pale and perfect in white velvet and ermine, unapproachable as the nearest star and tasty-looking as a charlotte russe. On each little pink ear glowed a cold green fire, like a radioactive pea, La Minx's only jewelry tonight. They were the famous Mumtaz green-diamond earrings, once the property of Shah Jahan's favorite wife, which had been clipped to Lili's lobes by the trembling hands of an Iraqi millionaire, who was running hard at the time in the sixth race of La Minx Handicap. Lili prized her green diamonds at least as highly as the ears to which they were attached.

Everything stopped as Lili posed in the archway for her usual moment of tribute; then life went on, and Lili bought a stack of hundred-dollar chips at the cashier's cage and made for the roulette table.

An hour later, her second stack was in the croupier's bank. Lili laughed and drifted toward the ladies' lounge, her slender fingers poised at her forehead delicately. No one spoke to her.

The trim French maid in the lounge came forward swiftly. "Madame has the headache?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps a cold compress—?"

"Please."

Lili lay down on a chaise longue and closed her eyes. At the cool touch of the wrapped icebag on her forehead she bestowed a smile. The maid adjusted the pillow about her head deftly, in sympathetic silence. It was quiet in the deserted lounge, and Lili floated off into her own world of dreams.

She awoke a few minutes later, put the icebag aside, and rose from the chaise. The maid had discreetly vanished. Lili went to a vanity and sat down to fix her hair . . .

And at that exact moment the gambling rooms of Paradise Gardens went berserk. Women shrieked, their escorts scuttled about like trapped crabs, the house men struggled with their nefarious tools, and the massive door gave way under the ax-heads of the police.

"Hold it!" An elderly man with a gray mustache hopped nimbly onto a crap table and held up his arms for silence. "I'm Inspector Queen of police headquarters on special gambling detail. This is a

raid, ladies and gentlemen. No sense trying to make a break; every exit is covered. Now if you'll all please line up along the walls while these officers get going—"

And that was when Lili Minx burst from the ladies' lounge like one of the Furies, screaming, "My diamond earrings! I been robbed!"

So immediately what had begun as a gambling raid turned into a robbery investigation. La Minx was in top form, and Inspector Queen did her bidding as meekly as a rookie cop. She had often enough disturbed his dreams, too.

As the axes rose and fell and the equipment flew apart, the Inspector was crooning, "Now don't you worry your pretty head, Miss Minx. We'll find your earrings—"

"And that creep of a maid!" stormed La Minx. "She's the only one who touched me, Inspector Queen. I want that maid clobbered, too!"

"She can't get away, Lili," soothed the Inspector, patting the lovely hand. "We've had the Paradise surrounded for an hour, getting set for the jump, and not a soul got out. So she has to be here . . . Well, Velie?" he barked, as the big Sergeant came loping from the ladies' lounge, furtively feeling his tie. "Where is the woman?"

"Right here," said Sergeant Velie, looking at Lili like a homesick Newfoundland. And he thrust into

Inspector Queen's hands, blindly, a maid's uniform, a starched cap and apron, a pair of high-heeled shoes, two sheer stockings, and a wig. "Dumped in the broom closet."

"What does this mean?" cried Lili, staring at the wig.

"Why, it's Harry the Actor," said the Inspector, pleased. "A clever character at female impersonation, Lili—he's made his finest hauls as a French maid. So Harry's tried it on you, has he? You just wait here, my dear," and the Inspector began to march along the lineup like a small gray Fate, followed by La Minx, who waited for no one.

"And here he is," said the Inspector cheerily, stopping before a short slender man with boyish cheeks which were very pale at the moment. "Tough luck, Harry—about the raid, I mean. Suppose we try this on for size, shall we?" and he clapped the wig on the little man's head.

"That's the one," said Lili Minx in a throbbing voice, and the little man turned a shade paler. She stepped up to him, and looked deep into his eyes. "You give me back my diamond earrings, or—" She mentioned several alternatives.

"Get her away from me, get her out of here," quavered Harry the Actor in his girlish treble, trying to burrow into the wall.

"Search him, Velie," said Inspector Queen sternly.

A half hour later, in the manager's office, with the drapes drawn

before the window, Harry the Actor stood shivering. On the desk lay his clothes and everything taken from his person—a wallet containing several hundred dollars, a pocketful of loose change, a ball of hard candy, a yellow pencil, a racing form, a pair of battered old dice, a crumpled cigarette pack and a booklet of matches, a tiny vial of French perfume, a lipstick, a compact, a handkerchief smeared with makeup, and a box of Kiss-Mee, the Magic Breath-Sweetener. Everything in parts had been disassembled. The cigarettes had been shredded. The hard candy had been smashed. Harry's clothing had been gone over stitch by stitch. His shoes had been tapped for hidden compartments. His mouth and hair had been probed. Various other indignities had been visited upon his person. Even the maid's outfit had been examined.

And no green-diamond earrings.

"All right," muttered the Inspector, "get dressed."

And all the while, from the other side of the manager's door, Lili's creamy voice kept promising Harry what was in store for him as soon as she could get her little hands on him.

And it drove the thief at last to a desperate folly. In the midst of stuffing his belongings back in his pockets, he leaped over the desk, stiff-armed the officer before the window, and plunged head first through the drapes like a goat. It

was a hard-luck night for Harry the Actor all around. The railing of the fire escape was rotted through with rust. His momentum took him into space, carrying the railing with him.

They heard the railing land on the concrete of the backyard three stories below, then Harry.

The officers posted in the yard were shaking their heads over the little man when Inspector Queen and Sergeant Velie dropped off the fire-escape ladder, followed—inevitably—by Lili.

If the thief had had any hope of cheating his fate, one glazed look at the furious beauty glaring down at him destroyed it. Either way he was a goner, and he knew it.

"Harry," said Inspector Queen, tapping the swollen cheek gently. "You're checking out. If you want a fair shake Upstairs, you'd better talk fast. Where did you stash 'em?"

Harry's eyes rolled. Then his tongue came out and he said thickly, "Diamonds . . . in . . . the Paradise . . ."

"In the Paradise *what*, Harry?" asked the Inspector frantically, as Harry stopped. "In the Paradise *where*?"

But Harry had had it.

Ellery always said that, if it wasn't his greatest case, it was certainly his shortest.

He first learned about it when his father staggered home at break-

fast time. Ellery got some coffee into the old man and extracted the maddening details.

"And I tell you, son," raved the Inspector, "we went back into that joint and tore it apart. It was rotten luck that Harry died before he could tell us just where in the Paradise Gardens he'd hidden Lili's diamonds. They had to be in the building somewhere, either in something or on someone. We still hadn't let anyone go from the raid. We not only took the Paradise apart piece by piece, we body-searched every mother's son and daughter on the premises, thinking Harry might have passed the earrings to an accomplice. Well, we didn't find them!" The Inspector sounded as if he were going to cry. "I don't know what I'll say to that lovely child."

"Diamonds speak louder than words," said Ellery briskly. "At least—from all I hear—in the case of Lili Minx."

"You mean . . . ?" said his father. "But how *can* you know where the Actor hid them?" he cried. "You weren't even there!"

"You told me. Harry was putting

his belongings away in his pockets when he made his sudden break. Where is Harry now, dad?"

"Harry? In the Morgue!"

"Then the Morgue is where Lili's earrings are."

"They were *on* him? But Ellery, we searched Harry outside and—and in!"

"Tell me again," said Ellery, "what he had in his pockets."

"Money, a dirty handkerchief, women's cosmetics, a hard candy, a racing form, cigarettes, a pair of dice, a pencil—"

"I quote you quoting the late Actor's dying statement," said Ellery. "Diamonds—in—the Paradise.'"

"Paradise . . ." The Inspector's jaw wiggled. "Pair o' dice! His dice were just shells—they're *in the dice!*"

"So if you'll phone the Morgue property clerk, dad—"

Inspector Queen turned feebly from the phone. "But Ellery, it did sound just like the word Paradise . . ."

"What did you expect from a dying man," asked Ellery reasonably, "elocution lessons?"



# Ellery Queen

## II: A Lump of Sugar

**I**F NOT FOR THE FACT THAT MOUNTED Patrolman Wilkins was doing the dawn trick on the bridle path, where it goes by the Park Tavern, the Shakes Cooney murderer would never have been solved. Ellery admits this cheerfully. He can afford to, since it was he who brought to that merry-go-round some much-needed horse sense.

A waiter with a hot date had neglected to strip one of his tables on the Tavern's open terrace at closing time the night before, whereupon the question was: Who had done a carving job on Cooney's so-called heart about 6 A.M. the next morning? Logic said nearly 8,000,000 people, or roughly the population of New York City, the law-abiding majority of whom might well have found Shakes Cooney's continued existence a bore. But Mounted Patrolman Wilkins was there when it counted, and it was he who collared the three gentlemen who, curiously, were in the neighborhood of the deserted Tavern and Cooney's corpse at that ungentlemanly hour.

Their collars were attached to very important necks, and when Inspector Richard Queen of police headquarters took over he handled them, as it were, with lamb's-wool knuckles. It was not every morn-

ing that Inspector Queen was called upon in a homicide to quiz a statesman, a financial titan, and an organization politician; and the little Inspector rose to the occasion.

Senator Kregg responded loftily, as to a reporter from an opposition newspaper.

Piers d'I. Millard responded remotely, as to a minority stockholder.

The Hon. Stevens responded affably, as to a party worker.

Lofty, remote, or affable, the three distinguished suspects in riding clothes agreed in their stories to the tittle of an iota. They had been out for an early canter on the bridle path. They had not addressed or seen any fourth person until the mounted policeman gathered them in. The life and death of Shakes Cooney were as nothing to them. Patrolman Wilkins's act in detaining them had been "totalitarian"—Senator Kregg; "ill-advised"—Financier Millard; "a sucker play"—Politician Stevens.

Delicately, Inspector Queen broached certain possibly relevant matters, *viz.*: In the national forest of politics, it was rumored, Senator Kregg (ex-Senator Kregg) was being measured as a great and spreading oak, of such timber as Presidents are made. Financier Pi-

ers d'I. Millard was said to be the Senator's architect, already working on the blueprints with his golden stylus. And small-souled political keyholers would have it that the Hon. Stevens was down on the plans as sales manager of the development. Under the circumstances, said the Inspector with a cough; some irreverent persons might opine that Shakes Cooney—bookie, tout, gambler, underworld slug, clubhouse creep, with the instincts of a jay and the ethics of a grave robber—had learned of the burial place of some body or other, the exhumation of which would so befoul the Senator's vicinity as to wither his noble aspirations on the branch. It might even be surmised, suggested Inspector Queen apologetically, that Cooney's price for letting the body stay buried was so outrageous as to cause Someone to lose his head. Would the gentlemen care to comment?

The Senator obliged in extended remarks, fortunately off the record, then he surged away. Prepared to totter after, Financier Millard paused long enough to ask reflectively, "And how long, did you say, Inspector Queen, you have been with the New York police department?", and it sounded like the *coup de grâce* to an empire. The Hon. Stevens lingered to ooze a few lubricating drops and then he, too, was gone.

When Ellery arrived on the scene he found his father in a good, if

thoughtful, temper. The hide, remarked Inspector Queen, was pretty much cut-and-dried; the question was, To whose door had Shakes been trying to nail it? Because Shakes Cooney hadn't been a man to take his murder lying down. The evidence on the Tavern terrace showed that after his assailant fled Cooney had struggled to his hands and knees, the Tavern steak knife stuck in his butchered chest, and that he had gorily crawled—kept alive by sheer meanness, protested the Inspector—to the table which the preoccupied waiter had forgotten to clear off the night before; that the dying man had then reached to the table top and groped for a certain bowl; and that from this bowl he had plucked the object which they had found in his fist—a single lump of sugar. Then, presumably with satisfaction, Shakes had expired.

"He must have been one of your readers," said the Inspector. "Because, Ellery, that's a dying message or I'm the Senator's uncle. But which one was Shakes fingering?"

"Sugar," said Ellery absently. "In Cooney's dictionary sugar means —"

"Sure. But Millard isn't the only one of the three who's loaded with heavy sugar. The ex-Senator's well-stocked, and he recently doubled his inventory by marrying that greeting-card millionaire's daughter. And Stevens has the first grand

he ever grafted. So Shakes didn't mean that kind of sugar. What's sugar mean in *your* dictionary, son?"

Ellery, who had left page 87 of his latest mystery novel in his typewriter, picked the lint off his thoughts. Finally he said, "Get me the equestrian history of Kregg, Millard, and Stevens," and he went back home to literature.

That afternoon his father phoned from Centre Street.

"What?" said Ellery, frowning over at his typewriter.

"About their horseback riding," snapped the Inspector. "The Senator used to ride, but he had a bad fall ten years ago and now he only punishes a saddle in the gym—the electrical kind. Moneybags hasn't been on the back of a plug since he walked out on Grandpa Millard's plowhorse in '88, in Indiana. Only reason Piers d'I. allowed himself to be jockeyed into those plushlined jodhpurs this morning, I'm pretty sure, is so he, Kregg, and Stevens could have a nice dirty skull session in the Park out of range of the TV cameras."

"And Stevens?"

"That bar insect?" snorted the old gentleman. "Only horse *he* knows how to ride is a dark one, with galluses. This morning's the first time Stevens ever set his suede-topped brogans into a stirrup."

"Well, well," said Ellery, sounding surprised. "Then what did Shakes mean? Sugar . . . Is one of

them tied up with the sugar industry in some way? Has Kregg ever been conspicuous in sugar legislation? Is Millard a director of some sugar combine? Or maybe Stevens owns some sugar stock. Try that line, dad."

His father said wearily, "I don't need you for that kind of fishing, my son. That's in the works."

"Then you're in," said Ellery; and without enjoyment he went back to his novel which, like Shakes Cooney, was advancing on its hands and knees.

Two days later Inspector Queen telephoned his report. "Not one of them is tied up with sugar in any way whatsoever. Only connection Kregg, Millard, and Stevens have with the stuff is what I take it they drop into their coffee." After a moment the Inspector said, "Are you there?"

"Lump of sugar," Ellery mumbled. "And Shakes evidently thought it would be clear . . ." The mumble ended in a glug.

"Yes?" said his father, brightening.

"Of course," chuckled Ellery. "Dad, get a medical report on those three. Then let me know which one of 'em has diabetes."

The Inspector's uppers clacked against his lowers. "That's my baby! That's it, son! It's as good as wrapped up!"

The following day Inspector Queen phoned again.

"Whose father?" asked Ellery,

running his fingers through his hair. "Oh! Yes, dad? What is it?"

"About the case, Ellery—"

"Case? Oh, the case. Yes? Well?

Which one's diabetic?"

The Inspector said: "None."

"None! You mean—"

"I mean."

"Hmm," said Ellery. "Hnh!"

For some time Inspector Queen heard nothing but little rumbles, pops, flutters, and other ruminative noises, until suddenly the line was cleared by a sound as definite as the electrocutioner's switch.

"You've got something," said the Inspector doubtfully.

"Yes. Yes," said Ellery, with no doubt whatever, but considerable relief. "Yes, dad, now I know whom Shakes Cooney meant!"

"Who?" demanded the Inspector.

"We ruled out all the reasonable interpretations of sugar," said Ellery, "leaving us where we started—with a lump of sugar in Cooney's clutch as a clue to his killer. Since the fancy stuff is out, suppose we take a lump of sugar in a man's hand to mean just that: a lump of sugar in a man's hand. Why does a

man carry a lump of sugar with him?"

"I give up," said the Inspector promptly. "Why?"

"Why?" said Ellery. "Why, to feed it to a horse."

"Feed it to a—" The old gentleman was silent. Then he said, "So that's why you wanted to know their riding history. But Ellery, that theory fizzled. None of the three is what you'd call a horseman, so none of the three would be likely to have a lump of sugar on him."

"Absolutely correct," said Ellery. "So Shakes was indicating a fourth suspect, only I didn't see it then. Cooney was a bookie and a gambler. You'll probably find that this fellow was over his noggin in Cooney's book, couldn't pay off, and took the impulsive way out—"

"Wait, hold it!" howled his father. "Fourth suspect? What fourth suspect?"

"Why, the fourth man on the bridle path that morning. And he would be likely to carry a lump of sugar for his horse."

*"Mounted Patrolman Wilkins!"*



# Budd Schulberg

## Murder on the Waterfront

*"The violent, vivid, restless, corrupted" waterfront—here is the background of Budd Schulberg's famous motion picture, with the same power, the same honesty, the same impact . . .*

THE ALARM WAS ABOUT TO RING when Matt Gillis reached out his bearlike, heavy-muscled arm and shut it off. Habit. Half-past 6. Summer with the light streaming in around the patched window shades, and winter when half-past 6 was black as midnight. Matt stretched his heavyweight, muscular body and groaned. Habit woke you up at half-past 6 every morning, but habit didn't make you like it—not on these raw winter mornings when the wind blew in from the sea, whipping along the waterfront with an intensity it seemed to reserve for longshoremen. He shivered in anticipation.

Matt listened to the wind howling through the narrow canyon of Eleventh Street and thought to himself: Another day, another icy-fingered, stinking day. He pushed one foot from under the covers to test the temperature, and then quickly withdrew it into the warmth of the double bed again. Cold. Damn that janitor, Lacey—the one they all called Rudolph because of his perpetually red nose. Never enough heat in the place.

Well, the landlord was probably saying, what do they expect for twenty-five a month?

Matt rolled over heavily, ready for the move into his work clothes. "Matt?" his wife, Franny, murmured, feeling for him in the dark. "I'll get up; fix you some coffee."

"It's all right." His buxom Fran. Matt patted her. Her plump-pretty Irish face was still swollen with sleep. For a moment he remembered her as she had been fifteen years ago: the prettiest kid in the neighborhood—bright, flirty, sky-blue eyes and a pug nose, a little bit of a girl smothered in Matt's big arms, a child in the arms of a grizzly. Now she was plump all over, something like him on a smaller, softer scale, as if she had had to grow along his lines to keep him company.

"Matt, you don't mind me gettin' fat?" she had whispered to him one night in the wide, metal-frame bed after the kids finally had fallen asleep.

"Naw, you're still the best-lookin' woman in the neighborhood," Matt had said gallantly.

"At least you can always find me in the dark," Fran had giggled. They had got to laughing then, until Fran had to stop him because everything Matt did, he did big—laugh, fight, eat, drink, tell off the mob in the union. Even when he thought he was talking normally he shouted, he bellowed, so when he had chuckled there in the bed, the children—Tom and Mickey and Kate and Johnny and Peggy, the five they had had so far—had stirred in their beds and Fran had said, "Shhh, if the baby wakes up you'll be walkin' the floor with her."

Matt swung his long legs out of the bed and felt the cold touch of the linoleum. He sat there a moment in his long underwear, thinking—he wasn't sure of what; the day ahead, the days of his youth, the time his old man came home from the pier with three fingers off his right hand (copper sheeting—cut off at the knuckle nice and clean), and all those years the old man battled for his compensation. It was all the old man could talk about, finally, and got to be a joke—never to Pop, but to Matt and his brothers when they were big enough to support him.

Big Matt sat there on the edge of the bed rubbing sleep out of his eyes, thinking, thinking, while his wife, warm and sweet and full in her nightgown, half rose behind him and whispered "Coffee? Let me get up and make you a cup of

coffee." She wanted to say more; she wanted to say, "Look, Matt honey, I know what it is to go down there to the shape-up when the sun is still climbing up the backs of the buildings. I know what it is for you to stand there with three-four hundred other men and have the hiring boss, Fisheye Moran, look you over like you was so much meat in a butcher shop. I know what it is for you to go to work every morning like you had a job—only you haven't got a job unless Fisheye, the three-time loser put there by the Village mob, hands you a brass check." She wanted to say, "Yes, and I know what it is for you to be left standing in the street; I know what you feel when the hiring boss looks through you with those pale blue fisheyes that give him his name." *That's all today, come back to-morra.*

Matt was on his feet now, a burly bear in his long underwear, stretching and groaning to push himself awake. Fran started to get up, but he put his big hand on her shoulder and pushed her back into the warm bed. Well, all right. She was glad to give in. When could a body rest except these precious few minutes in the early morning? "You be careful now, Matt. You be careful. Don't get in no trouble."

Fran knew her Matt the Irish-thick rebel of Local 474, one of the lionhearted—or foolhardy—handful who dared speak up against the

Lippy Keegan mob, which had the longshore local in their pocket, and the loading racket, the lunch-hour gambling, and all the other side lines that bring in a quick dollar on the docks. Lippy and his goons ran the neighborhood like storm troopers, and longshoremen who knew what was good for them went along with Keegan's boys and took what they could get. Matt was always trying to get others to back him up, but the fear was too deep. "Matt, I got me wife and kids to think about; leave me alone," they'd say, and push their 30 cents across the bar for another whiskey.

Matt tried to make as little noise as possible as he went down the creaky stairway. He closed the tenement door behind him and stood a moment in the clammy morning, feeling the weather. He zipped up his windbreaker and pulled his old cap down on his forehead. Then he drew his head down into the heavy collar, threw out his chest, and turned his face into the wind. It was a big, strong-boned, beefy face, with a heavy jaw and a broken nose, a face that had taken plenty. Over the years the Keegan boys had developed a begrudging respect for Matt. They had hit him with everything and he still kept coming on. The gift of getting up—that's what they called it on the waterfront.

Matt ducked into the Longdock Bar & Grill on the corner across the

street from the pier. It was full of longshoremen grabbing a cup of coffee and maybe some ham and eggs before drifting over to the shape-up. There were men of all sizes and ages, with weatherbeaten faces like Matt's, many of them with flattened noses, trophies of battles on the docks and in the bar-rooms; here and there were ex-pugs with big-time memories: the cheers of friends and five hundred dollars for an eight-rounder. Threading through the dock workers was a busy little man whose name was Billy Morgan, though everybody called him "J.P." because he was the money-lender for the mob. If you didn't work, J.P. was happy to lend you a deuce or half a bill, at ten per cent a week. If you fell too far behind, J.P. whispered to Fisheye, and Fisheye threw you a couple of days' work until the loan was paid off. They had you coming and going, the mob. Matt looked at J.P. and turned away.

Over in the corner were a couple of Lippy's pistols, Specs Sinclair, a mild-looking, pasty-skinned man who didn't look like an enforcer but had maybe a dozen stiffs to his credit, and Feets McKenna, a squat muscle man who could rough-and-tumble with the best. Feets was sergeant-at-arms for the local. Specs, for whom signing his name was a lot of writing, was recording secretary. Matt looked straight at them to show he wasn't backing

away, ever. Union officials. Only three-time losers need apply.

Matt pushed his way into the group at the short-order counter. They were men dressed like himself, in old trousers and flannel shirts, with old caps worn slightly askew in the old-country way. They all knew Matt and respected the way he stood up; but a stand-up guy, as they called him, was nobody you wanted to get close to. Not if you wanted to work and stay in one piece in Lippy Keegan's sector of the harbor.

Matt was waiting for his coffee when he felt a fist smash painfully into his side. He winced and started an automatic counter at whoever it was, and then he looked down and grinned. He should have known. It was Runt Nolan, whose hundred ring battles and 25 years of brawling on the docks were stamped into his flattened face. But a life of beatings had failed to deaden the twinkle in his eyes. Runt Nolan was always seeing the funny side, even when he was looking down the business end of a triggerboy's .38. Where other longshoremen turned away in fear from Lippy's pistoleros, Runt always seemed to take a perverse delight in baiting them. Sometimes they laughed him off and sometimes, if he went on provoking them—and longshoremen were watching to see if Runt could get away with it—they would oblige him with a blackjack or a piece of pipe. Runt

had a head like a rock and more lives than a pair of cats, and the stories of his miraculous recoveries from these beatings had become a riverfront legend.

Once they had left him around the corner in the alley lying face down in his own blood, after enough blows on the noggin to crack the skull of a horse; and an hour later, when everyone figured he was on his way to the morgue, damned if he didn't stagger back into the Longdock and pound the bar for whiskey. "I should worry what they do to me, I'm on borried time," Runt Nolan liked to say.

Runt grinned when he saw Matt rub his side with mock resentment. "Mornin', Matt me lad, just wanted t' see if you was in condition."

"Don't be worryin' about my condition. One more like that and I'll stand you right on your head."

"Come on, you big blowhard, I'm ready for you." Runt fell into a fierce boxing stance and jabbed his small knuckle-broken left fist into Matt's face.

Matt got his coffee and a sinker and sat down at one of the small tables with Runt. Runt was rarely caught eating. He seemed to consider the need for solid food something of a disgrace, a sign of weakness. Whiskey and beer and maybe once a day a corned-beef sandwich—that was Runt's diet, and in the face of medical science it had kept him wiry and resilient at fifty-five.

"What kind of a boat we got to-

day?" Matt asked. Runt lived in a two-dollar hotel above the Long-dock Bar and he was usually up on his shipping news.

"Bananas," Runt said, drawing out the middle vowel in disgust.

"Bananas!" Matt groaned. Bananas meant plenty of shoulder work, toting the heavy stalks out of the hold. A banana carrier was nothing less than a human pack mule. There was only one good thing about bananas: the men who worked steady could afford to lay off bananas, and so there was always a need for extra hands. The docker who had no *in* with the hiring boss, and even the fellow who was on the outs with the Keegan mob, stood a chance of picking up a day on bananas.

By the time Matt and Runt reached the pier, ten minutes before the 7:30 whistle, there were already a couple of hundred men on hand, warming themselves around fires in metal barrels and shifting their feet to keep the numbness away. Some of them were hard-working men with families, professional longshoremen whose Ireland-born fathers had moved cargo before them. And some of them were only a peg above the bum, casuals who drifted in for a day now and then to keep themselves in drinking money. Some of them were big men with powerful chests, large, raw-faced men who looked like throwbacks to the days of bare-knuckles fights-to-a-finish.

Some of them were surprisingly slight, wizen-faced men in cast-off clothing, the human flotsam of the waterfront.

Fisheye came out of the pier, flanked by a couple of the boys, "Flash" Gordon and "Blackie" McCook. There were about three hundred longshoremen waiting for jobs now. Obediently they formed themselves into a large horseshoe so Fisheye could look them over. Meat in a butcher shop. The men Fisheye wanted were the ones who worked. You kicked back part of your day's pay to Fisheye or did favors for Lippy if you wanted to work regular. You didn't have to have a record, but a couple of years in a respectable pen didn't do you any harm.

"I need two hundred banana carriers." Fisheye's hoarse voice seemed to take its pitch from the foghorns that barked along the Hudson. Jobs for two hundred men at a coveted \$2.27 an hour. The three, maybe four hundred men eyed one another in listless rivalry. "You—and you—Pete—okay, Slim . . ." Fisheye was screening the men with a cold, hard look. Nearly twenty years ago a broken-down dock-worker had gone across the street from the shape-up. "No work?" the bartender had said, perfunctorily, and the old man had answered, "Nah, he just looked right through me with those blasted fisheyes of his." Fisheye—it had made the bar-

tender laugh, and the name had stuck.

Anger felt cold and uncomfortable in Matt's stomach as he watched Fisheye pass out those precious tabs. He didn't mind seeing the older men go in, the ones he had shaped with for years, especially family men like himself. What gave him that hateful, icy feeling in his belly was seeing the young kids go in ahead of him, new-generation hoodlums like the fresh-faced Skelly kid who boasted of the little muscle jobs he did for Lippy and the boys as his way of paying off for steady work. Young Skelly had big ideas, they said around the bar. One of these days he might be crowding Lippy himself. That's how it went down here. "Peaches" Maloney had been Number One—until Lippy dumped him into the gutter outside the Long-dock. Matt had seen them come and go. And all the time he had stood up proud and hard while lesser men got the work tabs and the gravy.

Fisheye almost had his 200 men now. He put his hand on Runt Nolan's shoulder. "All right, you little sawed-off rat, go on in. But remember I'm doin' ya a favor. One word out of line and I'll bounce ya off the ship."

Runt tightened his hands into fists, wanting to stand up and speak his mind. But a day was a day and he hadn't worked steady enough lately to keep himself in

beers. He looked over at Matt with a helpless defiance and went on into the pier.

Matt waited, thinking about Fran and the kids. And he waited, thinking at Fisheyes: It ain't right, it ain't right, a bum like you havin' all this power. He couldn't keep it out of his face. Fisheye flushed and glared back at him and picked men all around Matt to round out his two hundred. He shoved Matt's face in it by coming toward him as if he were going to pick him and then reaching over his shoulder for Will Murphy, a toothless old sauce hound whom Matt could outwork five for one. There never had been enough caution in Matt, and now he felt himself trembling with anger. He was grabbing Fisheye before he had time to think it out, holding the startled boss by the thick lapels of his windbreaker.

"Listen to me, you fatheaded bum. If you don't put me on today I'll break you in two. I got kids to feed. You hear me, Fisheye?"

Fisheye pulled himself away and looked around for help. Blackie and young Skelly moved in.

"Okay, boys," Fisheye said, when he saw they were there. "I c'n handle this myself. This big-mouth is dumb, but he's not so dumb he wants to wind up in the river. Am I right, Matt me lad?"

In the river. A senseless body kicked off the stringpiece into the black and secretive river, while the city looked the other way. Cause of

death: accidental drowning. Dozens and dozens of good men had been splashed into the dark river like so much garbage. Matt knew some of the widows who had stories to tell, if only someone would listen. In the river. Matt drew away from Fisheye. What was the use? Outnumbered and outgunned. But one of these days—went the dream—he and Runt would get some action in the local, some following; they'd call a real election and—

Behind Matt a big truck blasted its horn, ready to drive into the pier. Fisheye thumbed Matt to one side. "All right, get moving, you're blocking traffic, we got a ship to turn around." Matt spat into the gutter and walked away.

Back across the street in the Longdock, Matt sat with a beer in front of him, automatically watching the morning television: some good-looking, fast-talking dame selling something—yatta-ta yatta-ta yatta-ta. In the old days, at least you had peace and quiet in the Longdock until the boys with the work tabs came in for lunch. Matt walked up the riverfront to another gin mill and sat with another beer. Now and then a fellow like himself would drift in, on the outs with Lippy and open to Matt's arguments about getting up a petition to call an honest union election: about time we got the mob's foot off'n our necks; sure, they're tough, but if there's enough of us

... it was the old dream of standing up like honest-to-God Americans instead of like oxen with rings in their noses.

Matt thought he was talking quiet but even his whisper had volume, and farther down the bar Feets and Specs were taking it in. They weren't frowning or threatening, but just looking, quietly drinking and taking it all in.

When Matt finished his beer and said see-ya-later, Specs and Feets rose dutifully and followed him out. A liner going down-river let out a blast that swallowed up all the other sounds in the harbor. Matt didn't hear them approach until Feets had a hand on his shoulder. Feets was built something like Matt, round and hard. Specs was slight and not much to look at. He wore very thick glasses. He had shot the wrong fellow once. Lippy had told him to go out and buy a new pair of glasses and warned him not to slip up that way again.

"What d'ya say, Matt?" Feets asked, and from his tone no one could have thought them anything but friends.

"Hello, Feets, Specs," Matt said.

"Listen, Matt, we'd like to talk to you a minute," Feets said.

"Then talk," Matt said. "As long as it's only talk, go ahead."

"Why do you want to give us so much trouble?" Specs said—any defiance of power mystified him. "You should straighten yourself out, Matt. You'd be working three-

four days a week if you just learned to keep that big yap of yours shut."

"I didn't know you were so worried about whether I worked or not."

"Matt, don't be such a thickheaded mick," Feets argued. "Why be agitatin' alla time? You ain't gonna get anywheres, that's for sure. All ya do is louse yourself up with Lippy."

Matt said something short and harsh about Lippy. Feets and Specs looked pained, as if Matt were acting in bad taste.

"I wish you wouldn't say stuff like that," Specs said. His face got very white when he was ready for action. On the waterfront he had a reputation for enjoying the trigger squeezing. "You keep saying that stuff and we'll have to do something about it. You know how Lippy is."

Matt thought a moment about the danger of saying what he wanted to say: Fran and the kids home waiting for money he'd have to borrow from the moneylender. Why look for trouble? Why buck for the bottom of the river? Was it fair to Fran? Why couldn't he be like so many other longshoremen —like Flanagan, who had no love for Lippy Keegan but went along to keep food on the table? Lippy ran the piers just like he owned them. You didn't have to like Lippy, but it sure made life simpler if he liked you.

Matt thought about all this, but

he couldn't help himself. He was a self-respecting man, and it galled him that a pushy racketeer—a graduate of the old Arsenal Mob—and a couple of punks could call themselves a union. I shouldn't say this, Matt was thinking, and he was already saying it:

"Yeah, I know how Lippy is. Lippy is gonna get the surprise of his stinkin' life one of these days. Lippy is gonna find himself—"

"You dumb harp," Feets said. "You must like to get hit in the head."

"There's lots I like better," Matt admitted. "But I sure as hell won't back away from it."

Feets and Specs looked at each other and the glance said clearly: What are you going to do with a thickhead like this? They shrugged and walked away from Matt, back to their places at the bar. Later in the day they would give Lippy a full account and find out the next move. This Matt Gillis was giving their boss a hard time. Everything would be lovely down here if it wasn't for this handful of talk-back guys. They leaned on the bar with a reassuring sense that they were on the side of peace and stability, that Matt Gillis was asking for trouble.

Matt met Runt in the Longdock around five-thirty. Runt was buying because he had the potatoes in his pocket. They talked about this petition they were getting up to call a regular meeting. Runt had

been talking to a couple of old-timers in his hatch gang who were half scared to death and half ready to go along. And there were maybe half a dozen young fellows who had young ideas and no use for the old ways of buying jobs from Fish-eye and coming on the double whenever Lippy whistled. Another round or two and it was supper-time.

"Have another ball, Matt. The money's burnin' a hole in me pocket."

"Thanks, Runt, but I gotta get home. The wife'll be hittin' me with a mop." This was a familiar joking threat in the Gillis domain.

Matt wiped his mouth with his sleeve and rubbed his knuckles on Runt's head. "Now don't get in no arguments. You watch yourself now." It was bad business, Matt knew, bucking the mob and hitting the bottle at the same time. They could push you into the drink some night and who was to say you weren't dead drunk, just another "death by accidental drowning."

Matt was worried about Runt as he walked up the dark side street to his tenement. Runt took too many chances. Runt liked to say, "I had me fun and I drunk me fill. What've I got to lose?"

I better keep my eye on the little fella now that we're pushin' so hard for this up-and-up election, Matt was thinking, when he felt something solid whop him just be-

hind the ear. The blow had force enough to drop a horse but Matt half turned, made a club of his right hand and was ready to wield it when the something solid whopped him again at the back of his head. He thought it was the kid, the Skelly punk, there with Feets, but he wasn't sure. It was dark and his head was coming apart. In a bad dream something was swinging at him on the ground—hobnailed shoes, the finishing touch. Feets, they called him. The darkness closed in over him like a black tarpaulin. . . .

Everybody was talking at once and—was it time for him to get up and shape?—he was sprawled on the bed in his room. Go 'way, lemme sleep.

"Matt, listen, this is Doc Wolff." The small, lean-faced physician was being pushed and breathed on. "The rest of you go on, get out of here."

Half the tenement population was crowded into the Gillises' narrow flat. Mrs. Geraghty, who was always like that, took the kids up to eat at her place. Doc Wolff washed out the ugly wounds in Matt's scalp. Half the people in the neighborhood owed him money he would never see—or ask for. Some of the old-timers still owed his father, who insisted on practicing at seventy-five. Father and son had patched up plenty of wounds like these. They were specialists

on black-jack, steel-pipe and gun-butt contusions. Jews in an Irish district, they never took sides, verbally, in the endless guerrilla war between the dock mob and the "insolents." All they could do, when a longshoreman got himself in a fix like this, was to overlook the bill. The Wolffs were still poor from too much overlooking.

"Is it serious, Doctor?"

"We'd better X-ray, to make sure it isn't a skull fracture. I'd like to keep him in St. Vincent's a couple of days."

It was no fracture, just a couple of six-inch gashes and a concussion—a neat professional job performed according to instructions. "Don't knock him out of the box for good. Just leave him so he'll have something to think about for a week or two."

On the second day Runt came up with a quart and the good news that the men on the dock were signing the petition. The topping of Matt had steamed them up, where Lippy had figured it would scare them off. Runt said he thought they had enough men, maybe a couple of dozen, to call a rank-and-file meeting.

Father Conley, a waterfront priest with savvy and guts, had offered the rectory library as a haven.

But that night Fran sat at the side of Matt's bed in the ward for a long talk-to. She had a plan. It had been on her mind for a long time. This was her moment to push it

through. Her sister's husband worked for a storage company. The pay was good, the work was regular, and best of all there weren't any Lippy Keegans muscling you if you didn't play it their way. This brother-in-law said there was an opening for Matt. He could come in on a temporary basis and maybe work his way into regular union membership if he liked it. The brother-in-law had a little pull in that direction.

"Please, Matt. Please." It was Fran's domestic logic against his bull-dog gift of fighting back. If he was a loner like Runt Nolan, he could stand up to Lippy and Specs and Feets and young Skelly and the rest of that trash all he wanted. But was it fair to Fran and the kids to pass up a sure seventy-five dollars a week in order to go hungry and bloody on the piers?

"Why does it always have to be you that sticks his neck out? Next time it'll be worse. They'll . . ."

Yest, Matt knew. The river: Lippy Keegan's silent partner, the old North River, waiting for him in the dark.

"Okay, Franny," Matt was saying under his bandages. "Okay. Tell Denny"—that was the brother-in-law—"I'll take the job."

In the storage vaults it was nice and quiet. The men came right to work from their homes. There was none of that stopping in at the corner and shooting the breeze about ships coming in and where the jobs

might be—no hit or miss. The men were different too: good steady workers who had been there for years, not looking for any excitement. It seemed funny to Matt not to be looking behind him to see if any of Lippy's boys were on his tail, funny to have money in his pockets without having to worry how he was going to pay it back to the loan sharks.

When Matt had been there three weeks, Fran went out and bought herself a new dress—the first new one in almost two years. And the following Sunday they went up to the park and had lunch at the cafeteria near the zoo—their first visit to a restaurant in Lord knows when. Fran put her hand in Matt's and said, "Oh, Matt, isn't this better? Isn't this how people are supposed to live?"

Matt said yeah, he guessed so. It was good to see Fran happy and relaxed, no longer worried about food on the table for the kids, or whether he'd get home in one piece. Only—he couldn't put it into words, but when he got back to work on the fifth floor of the huge storage building, he knew what was going to come over him.

And next day it did, stronger than at any time since he started. He wondered what Runt was doing, and Jocko and Bagles and Timmy and the rest of the gang in the Longdock. He hadn't been in since the first week he started at the storage. The fellows had all

asked him how he was feeling and how he liked the new job, but he felt something funny about them, as if they were saying, "Well, you finally let Lippy run you off the docks, huh, Matt?" "All that big talk about cleaning up the union and then you fold like an accordion, huh, Matt?" It was in their eyes—even Runt's.

"Well, I'm glad to see you got smart and put your hook away." Runt actually said. "Me, I'd do the same if I was a family man. But I always run too fast for the goils to catch me." Runt laughed and poked Matt lightly, but there was something about it wasn't the same.

Matt ran into Runt on the street a week or so later and asked him how everything was going. He had heard the neighborhood scuttlebutt about a new meeting coming up in the parish house. A government labor man was going to talk to them on how to get their rights. Father Conley had pulled in a trade-union lawyer for them and everything seemed to be moving ahead.

But Runt was secretive with Matt. Mike felt the brush; he was an outsider now. Runt had never said a word in criticism of Matt's withdrawal from the waterfront—just occasional cracks about fellows like himself who were too dumb to do anything else but stand their ground and fight it out. But it got under Matt's skin. He had the face

of a bruiser, and inlanders would think of him as "tough-looking." But actually Matt was thin-skinned, emotional, hypersensitive. Runt wouldn't even tell him the date of the secret meeting, just asked him how he liked the storage job.

"It's a real good deal," Matt said. No seven-thirty shape-up. No muscle men masquerading as shop stewards. The same check every week. What more could he want?

What more than stacking cardboard containers in a long tunnel-like room illuminated by neon tubing? Matt wondered what there was about the waterfront. Why did men humiliate themselves by standing like cattle in the shape-up? What was so good about swinging a cargo hook—hoisting cement, copper ore, coffee, noxious cargoes that tickled your throat and maybe were slowly poisoning you?

But that didn't tell the whole story, Matt was thinking as he handled the storage container automatically. There was the salt air; there were the ships coming in from Spain, from South America, Greece, all over the world. There was the way the river sparkled on a bright day. And there was the busy movement of the harbor: the sound of the ferries, the tugs, the barges, the freighters, and the great luxury ladies with their autocratic noses in the air. There were the different kinds of cargoes to handle—furs, perfumes, sardines, cognac

—and who was to blame them if they got away with a bottle or two; it wasn't pilferage on the waterfront until you trucked it away. There was the teamwork of a good gang working the cargo from the hatch and over the deck to the pier: the winch men, the deck men, the hatch boss, the high-low drivers, everybody moving together to an unstated but strongly felt rhythm that could be thrown off if just one man in a twenty-three-man gang didn't know his job. And then there were the breaks for lunch—not cold sandwiches in a metal container but a cut of roast beef in the bar across the street, with a cold beer to wash it down. And there was the talk of last night's fight or today's ball game or the latest cute trick pulled off by the longshore racketeers.

The waterfront: the violent, vivid, restless, corrupted, "we're-doin'-lovely" waterfront.

Matt felt that way for days and said nothing about it. He'd sit in the front room with his shoes off drinking beer, reading the tabloids, and wondering until it ached him what Runt and the boys were up to.

One evening when he came home, Flanagan and Bennett and some of the other neighbors were busy talking on the steps. Matt heard. "Maybe he's just on one of his periodicals and he's sleeping it off somewhere." And, "He coulda shipped out somewhere. He used

to be an A.B. and he's just ornery enough to do it." And Matt heard, "When he gets his load on, anything c'n happen. He could walk off the end of the pier into the river and think he was home in bed."

Runt Nolan! No hide nor hair of him in three days, Flanagan said. Matt ran upstairs to tell Fran. She saw the look in his eyes when he talked about Runt, who always said he was "on borried time." "Now, Matt, no use getting yourself excited. Wait and see. Now, Matt." She saw the look in his eyes was the old look, before he settled for the cozy inland job with the storage company.

He paced up and down, but the children got on his nerves and he went over to talk to Father Conley. The father was just as worried as Matt. Specs had been warning Runt not to hold any more meetings in the rectory. Specs had told Runt to take it easy for his own good.

Matt went home after a while but he couldn't sleep. At one thirty in the morning he put his clothes back on and went down to the Longdock. What's the story, and news of Runt?

Nine days later there was news of Runt. The police department had made contact with Runt, by means of a grappling hook probing the soft, rotten bottom of the river. Runt wasn't "on borried time" any more. He had paid back every minute of it. Cause of death:

accidental drowning. On the night of his disappearance, Runt had been seen wandering the gin mills in a state of inebriation. In other words, bagged. There were no marks of violence on Runt. How could anyone prove he hadn't skipped. The good old North River, Lippy's silent partner, had done it again.

It was a good funeral. Everybody in the neighborhood was there—even Lippy Keegan, and Specs and Skelly and the rest of the boys. After the Mass, Father Conley came out on the sidewalk, and Matt and some of the others who were closest to Runt gathered around to hear what the father had to say.

They had seen the father steamed before but never like this. "Accident my eye," he said. "If they think we're going to take this lying down, they're dumber than I think they are."

"What can we do, Father?"

Everybody looked around. It was Flanagan, who had come up behind Matt; Flanagan, who always played it very cozy with the Keegans. But like most of the others, he had liked having Runt around—that cocky little bantam. The Longdock wouldn't be the same without him. It looked like Runt, at the bottom of the river, had done more damage to Lippy than when he was around the docks shooting off his mouth.

Father Conley said, "We're going to keep this case alive. We'll question every single person who talked to Runt the day they hit him in the head. We'll keep needling the police for action. Keegan hasn't heard the end of Runt Nolan."

"Now's the time to put somebody up to run for president against Lippy," the Bennett kid said.

Everybody looked at Matt. Matt looked down at his uncomfortable black shoes. He would have given anything to have been with Runt the night Keegan's cowboys caught up with the little guy.

"That's right, keep pressing them," Father Conley said. "Maybe they don't know it yet, but times are changing. One of these days you're going to knock them out of the box for good." He looked at Matt and said, "I can help you. But I can't do it for you. It takes leadership."

Matt looked down at the sidewalk. He always felt strange in his dark blue suit. He looked over at Fran, talking with some of the other wives. In his mind, Fran and the storage company and the welfare of the kids were all churning around with Runt and what Father Conley was saying and the faces of these dock workers looking at him and waiting for him . . .

The morning after the funeral Matt's alarm clock split the silence at six thirty. Matt swung his legs

over the side of the bed. Fran stirred behind him. "I'll get up and make you some coffee." She sat up and they looked at each other.

"I'm sorry, Fran, I—"

"Don't be," she said.

Even before what happened to Runt, she had felt it coming. And on the way home from church he had said, "All the fellers liked Runt. There'll be hell to pay. Now's the time to get 'em movin' in the right direction."

Fran, sitting up in bed behind him, said, "Don't get in no more trouble than you can help, Matt."

Matt stood up and stretched, groaned, and reached for his pants. "Don't worry, I'm gonna watch myself. I ain't gonna take no crazy chances like Runt, Lord-ve-mercy-on-'im."

She wasn't even disappointed about the storage job. A storage man is a storage man, a longshoreman is a longshoreman. In the deepest part of her mind she had known that all along.

"I'll get up make you some coffee," she said again, as she had a thousand times before, as she would—if he was lucky—a thousand times again.

For a moment he roughed her up affectionately. "You're gettin' fat, honey." Then he was pulling his wool checkerboard shirt on over his long underwear. If there was enough work, Fisheye was liable to pick him, to take it look good if there was an investigation.

The cargo hook felt good in his belt. He zipped up his windbreaker, told Fran not to worry, set his cap at the old-country angle, and tried not to make too much noise on the creaky stairway as he made his way down through the sleeping tenement.

Flanagan was coming out of his door as Matt reached the bottom landing. The old docker was yawning and rubbing sleep out of his eyes but he grinned when he saw who it was.

"Matt me lad, we'll be needin' ya, that's for sure."

We. It had taken Flanagan a long time to get his mouth around that *we*. There wasn't any *we* over at the storage company. Matt nodded to Flanagan, a little embarrassed, and fussed with his cap like a pitcher.

"Once a stand-up guy, always a stand-up guy, huh, Matt?"

Matt grunted. He didn't want them to make too much of a deal out of it. Matt felt better when he got outside and the wind came blowing into his face. It felt good —like the cargo hook on his hip.

As they reached the corner, facing the elevated railroad tracks that ran along the river, two figures came up from a basement—Specs Sinclair and young Skelly. Specs had a bad cold. He was a sinus sufferer in the wintertime. He wished he was down in Miami scoring on the horses.

"So you want more?" he said to

Matt, daubing his nose with a damp handkerchief. "We run you out of here once but you ain't satisfied. What's a matter, you lookin' to wear cement shoes?"

Matt gazed at him and felt pleased and excited that he was back with this old hoodlum Sinclair and this punk Skelly. They were old friends in reverse.

"Quit racing your motor," Matt said. "It ain't gonna be so easy this time. None of us is gonna go wanderin' around alone half gassed like Runt Nolan. We're stickin' together now. And Father Conley's got the newspapers watchin'. You hit me in the head and next thing you know they'll hit you with ten thousand volts."

Specs looked at Skelly. Everything was getting a little out of hand, there was no doubt about it. In the old days you could knock off an old bum like Nolan and that was the end of it. This Matt Gillis, why didn't he stay in cold storage? For the first time in his life Specs worried whether Keegan would know the next move.

Matt crossed the street and pushed open the door of the Long-dock. Everybody knew he was back. Everybody was going to be watching him. He wished Runt would come over and stick him in the side with a left hand. He knew it wasn't very likely, but it made him feel better to wonder if that scrappy little son-of-a-biscuit-eater was going to be watching too.

# Hugh Pentecost

## A Matter of Justice

*A horrifying and hair-raising story of the strange events surrounding a hunt to exterminate a pack of wild dogs—outlaw dogs, killer dogs, that have been terrorizing the Connecticut countryside . . . a memorable short novel.*

FEAR HAD NOT YET TAKEN HOLD of Macklyn. He was lost and it was absurd and it made him angry, but he wasn't afraid. He knew that a mile or two from where he was were houses and farms and traveled highways. Not five minutes ago he had paused to listen to the sound of a train whistle, and by some trick of the wind or atmosphere, the click of the freight-car wheels had seemed to be only a few hundred yards away. He remembered reading, as a boy, how people who got lost in the woods found themselves moving in ever-tightening circles, suddenly coming on the same tree, the same clump of rocks, the same pool of water. Macklyn didn't know one tree from another, and if he had retraced his path he certainly hadn't recognized it.

One point was certain. Everybody was going to have a hell of a fine laugh at his expense when he got back to the Crowder place. He was lost in the wilds of Connecticut, probably within hailing distance of Larry Cuyler's ornate swim-

ming pool! He imagined that some of the less determined hunters were already back at Lib Crowder's, toasting their feet in front of the big fieldstone fireplace in her living room, and laughing at the idea of the blind leading the blind. One thing, Macklyn thought bitterly, was a sure bet: Dicky Crowder was at home and sound asleep in his bed.

Macklyn remembered riding, when he was about sixteen years old, on a train with his grandfather. They had been going in from the old man's Dutchess County home to see the circus at Madison Square Garden. Somewhere around Ossining, the old man had a severe heart attack. Macklyn, paralyzed with fright, tried to help him without success.

A man sitting across the aisle had seen what was happening. "See if you can find a doctor on the train," he ordered Macklyn.

Macklyn had started walking back through the crowded cars. People looked at him as he swayed along the aisles, looked at him with

glazed eyes, their heads bobbing slightly with the movement of the train. All Macklyn had to do was raise his voice and ask if there was a doctor in the car. He couldn't make a sound come out of his throat.

The bobbing heads and sightless eyes seemed forbidding, terrifying. He walked to the very end of the train and then back, cramps agonizing his stomach, sweat pouring down inside his clothes. He couldn't call out for help. By the time he got back to his grandfather, help had arrived. One of the train crew had found a doctor up forward.

The incident came back to Macklyn now. All he had to do was call out. He knew there were forty-five or fifty men in the woods, hunting for the cattle killers. All he had to do was to attract attention to himself, and he would get help. But somehow that same sickening embarrassment he had felt fifteen years ago was on him. It was not merely that he would be the butt of laughter when they learned that he'd set out to find six-year-old Dicky Crowder and had got lost himself. It was as though crying out for help was an admission of some kind of secret and terrible guilt. It was absurd, but he just couldn't yell!

More exasperated with himself than with anything else, he finally sat down on a rock and fished in the pocket of his trench coat for a cigarette, after gently placing Lib's

shotgun on the ground beside him, the barrel pointed away from him with elaborate care. The moon appeared fitfully. The woods would be quite light for a minute or so at a time, and then pitch dark for a longer spell.

Macklyn was cold. In the open country where the sun could get at it, the winter's snow had melted completely, but here in the woods it still lay in a thin film over leaves and shrubs. Macklyn had come for the weekend at the Crowders' with a city man's idea of country clothes —slacks, a couple of tweed jackets, his trench coat with the zipped-in lining, and his heaviest pair of shoes. The shoes were heavy and hand-sewn, but despite the advertisement they were *not* waterproof, Macklyn's feet felt clammy and damp. His right thumb throbbed slightly from the pain of a stubborn thorn that had punctured his inadequate suède glove. He was, simply stated, not dressed for the woods. He didn't like the woods. He had lugged that blasted shotgun with him for over three hours, the shells still in the pocket of his coat, because Lib has insisted that he take it. He'd never fired a shotgun in his life; He wasn't even sure he would know how to load it. He'd been embarrassed to ask Lib: "Some of these dogs are more dangerous than wolves," Lib had said. "They don't wait to be cornered."

There had been much talk of the

wild dogs that were the object of the night's hunt, stories that Macklyn had listened to with some amused cynicism—Paul Bunyan tales. Nobody seemed to be quite clear where the dog packs came from. Perhaps they had come over the hills from another town. Pigs had been killed, flocks of chickens decimated. Worse than that, the dogs were now running cattle. One of Digby March's Angus steers had been run down, hamstrung, and his throat eaten out. A milch cow on the Anderson farm had had her tongue torn out of her mouth and bled to death in the pasture, the dogs feeding off her flesh while she still lived. A prize bull on the Cuyler place, staked out in the south pasture, had been attacked; he'd torn the imprisoning ring out of his nose and plunged into the swimming pool after a hard run to save himself. Wood choppers had been stalked for hours, and finally had to beat off the attacking dogs with the butts of their axes.

One of the theories was that summer people went off and left pet dogs to forage for themselves. The dogs would gravitate toward the town dump and eat the garbage. A bitch would have puppies and out of these grew the beginnings of a pack of wild dogs, animals that had never known human affection or training. As the winter came and the dump froze over, the dogs would begin to live off the dump rats and other wild life, and finally

they would move in a pack toward a lusher diet of warm flesh.

It was all quite horrifying and hair-raising, Macklyn had thought as he listened, but probably pretty well exaggerated. To him a dog was a dog. You just let him know you were his master, didn't act frightened, and you were in control. Macklyn wasn't afraid of dogs, and the stories didn't make him afraid.

The local fish-and-game club had arranged for a hunt to exterminate the dogs, and everyone in the countryside had set out to find the marauders. Macklyn, a weekend visitor, hadn't joined in. He didn't have the clothes for an allnight tramp in the woods; he didn't own a gun and couldn't have hit a barn door with a handful of rice.

Anyway, he was delighted to think of an evening alone with Lib. He had questions to ask her, questions he had kept buried deep in his heart for a long time. The dog hunt promised him a few hours of privacy, free from the neighbors who seemed to have made a sort of club of the charming remodeled farmhouse where Lib lived. Then Dicky had disappeared.

The hunters had been gone about an hour, and twilight was just fading out into darkness, when Dicky was missed. For nearly an hour the six-year-old boy had been greatly distressed by the absence of a beagle pup named Sorrowful which was

the apple of his eye. Dogs of any kind would not be safe in the woods that night. Thee countryside had been warned to keep its pets at home. Trigger-happy hunters were not going to hold their fire to look for license tags. Sorrowful had gone AWOL, and Dicky was near tears. And then suddenly Dicky was among the missing. The inference was clear: he'd gone off on his stumpy legs to find Sorrowful.

Lib would, under ordinary circumstances, have headed the search for her small son, but Lib was anchored in the big chair before the fire because of a broken ankle. Macklyn, secretly cursing Dicky and Sorrowful, was the only person who could go. Every other able-bodied man was off in the hunting party.

"He can't have got very far," Macklyn said reassuringly to Lib Crowder.

Taking the shotgun on Lib's insistence, Macklyn set out, first around the barns and sheds, and then finally circling wider until he reached the edge of the woods, always calling Dicky. Just as he was about to retrace his steps he saw, at the edge of the woods, the tiny imprint of Dicky's overshoes in the unmelted snow. He started to follow the trail, lost it after five minutes, continued on until here he was, three hours later, hopelessly lost, exasperated, and indignant.

He flicked on his lighter, lit a cigarette, and inhaled the smoke

deep into his lungs. At the same time he thought he heard something moving in the brush directly in front of him. He tried holding the lighter above his head, but it didn't do any good.

And then the moon came out from behind a-cloud, and Macklyn saw the killer.

Catching the wild dogs was serious business. The Cuylers, Digger March, Van Anderson and a half dozen others had drawn lots to see who would sacrifice a calf as bait for the dogs. Two young calves had been taken out into the woods, butchered, and left there in the hope that the winter breezes would carry the smell of warm blood to the hungry pack and bring them from their hiding place into ambush. What Macklyn saw, or thought he saw, was the dark shape of a black Angus calf, lying in its own blood in a patch of snow, with the killer's nose at the throat.

Macklyn felt the hair rising on the back of his neck. He had never seen such an animal before in his life. The dog had raised its head from the dark, bleeding mass in front of it, evidently attracted by Macklyn's cigarette lighter. It didn't move or start. In the moonlight its eyes, set in grayish-brown fur, were a baleful yellow. Its lips were drawn back slightly along a row of murderous white fangs.

Across a space of fifteen yards, man and dog stared at each other,

and the fear was all in the man. The animal was, Macklyn guessed, some kind of sinister cross between great Dane and German shepherd. For a few seconds Macklyn waited expectantly for the roar of gunfire. He had stumbled on an ambush where the hunters would be waiting for the sight of dog or dogs. But there was no sound except an ominous rumble in the throat of the beast staring at Macklyn.

Macklyn had no experience to call on in this moment. He was not a hunter. He could not turn the woods to his advantage. He had no skill with a gun, and the gun which lay on the ground beside him was not loaded and he hadn't bothered to familiarize himself with its mechanism. The moon would be gone in an instant and he couldn't hope to load the gun in the dark. He couldn't do it till he had this much light again and then he'd have to concentrate on the job. That monstrous dog could be on him in a flash—while he simply reached out his hand for the gun.

The cigarette scorched Macklyn's fingers, and he dropped it in the snow. The rumble grew louder in the dog's throat, and it seemed to Macklyn that the animal crouched a little, as if preparing to spring. Macklyn's behavior then wasn't thought out; it was instinctive. If he remained absolutely motionless, the dog might decide there was no danger and go back to his feeding.

So Macklyn sat there, his mouth and throat so dry they ached, his heart pounding against his ribs.

The dog seemed to be thinking it out, too. The yellow eyes never left Macklyn. And then an extraordinary thing happened: the bait moved. Instantly the dog pounced at it, pinioning it with his paws, worrying at it with his mouth.

Macklyn was too frightened to think clearly. The calves had been killed for bait early that day, hours and hours ago. How the dead animal could move was a matter Macklyn didn't stop to consider. The movement had distracted the killer which was all Macklyn cared about. Slowly he reached down with his right hand, feeling along the ground for the shotgun. He heard another sound, blood-curdlingly human, from the dog.

Then Macklyn was on his feet, the gun gripped in his right hand, and he thought: I'm going to faint, and instantly thought again: I'm going to die!

The sense of undiluted horror was so great that Macklyn felt he must burst open with it.

The gurgling human sound did not seem to come from the dog but from the bait. Something thrashed out in the snow as the dog pounced again, gnawing and slavering. *A man's hand and arm!* The bait was no calf. It was a man—a man who still lived; a man at whose throat the dog snarled and ripped.

A sound that had been bottled in

Macklyn since he was fifteen years old split the night. He screamed at the top of his lungs.

Lib Crowder was not yet afraid. She sat in her chair before the fire, which had burned down to a few red ashes on the hearth. It was too difficult for her to move her injured ankle off the pillow on which it rested, wrestle with her crutches, and try to get fresh logs on the irons.

She wasn't too anxious about Macklyn, only ruefully amused at the way her plans had gone awry. Lib Crowder's world had been whirling dizzily around her for almost two years now, too complex to handle, and most of her basic sense of values was obscured. She needed an anchor, and she had reached out into the past for Macklyn. Macklyn imagined that Lib hadn't the slightest idea that he was in love with her, and had always been in love with her. He had always been entirely circumspect, a friend of the family, his affection placed in a carefully hidden niche that Lib would never see. But Lib was a woman, and a sensitive one, and she had always known, from the very first day, how he really felt. It was right and proper that how he felt should never be brought to the surface, or he would have had to give up his friendship for her and for Lucian.

She had met them both, Lucian and Macklyn, at the same cocktail

party. Crowder and Graves were the fair-haired boys of Broadway then. Lucian Crowder had money, and Macklyn Graves had taste and wisdom about the theater. Between them they had set up a producing firm that had three hits going that season and several plays in the works. The two men had great respect for each other, and their talents meshed perfectly. Lucian was a complete extrovert, could charm his way through any situation, could handle the most temperamental actress, author, or director. "I'm old Joe Public Relations himself," Lucian conceded.

Macklyn was the member of the firm who knew the theater, who could find gold in a new script, who could sweat it out with the author, whose taste was impeccable who knew theatrical technique backward and how to keep its slip from showing.

Jointly Lucian and Macklyn had the Midas touch. Mutual respect was a basis for mutual fondness. But no two men could have been basically more different. Lucian was a sportsman—a polo player, crack golfer, a man who had lived most of his life outdoors and loved any sport that could be played under the sun. Macklyn was a frustrated artist who had had the good sense to turn his talent to promoting the arts instead of trying to be in them. He was quiet and controlled, and his feelings were deeper than those of Lucian, who was

always protesting how deep his feelings were. But it was Lucian who had swept Lib off her feet, married her, and made her, with only the vaguest reservations, happier than she had ever dreamed of being. There had been the duplex apartment in New York, and the model farm here near Sharon. There had been Dicky.

And then there had been the day when Lucian, currently a mad amateur aviator, had flown his private Cub plane, against advice of airport officials, out over Long Island Sound into an approaching thunderstorm and had never been seen again.

For months after that Lib clung to the hope that Lucian would be found—even after bits of the Cub's wreckage had been picked up by yachtsmen off Westport. Of course, Macklyn had stood by. But so had her many newly made friends near Sharon: Grace and Larry Cuyler, Van Anderson, Digby March, and others. Finances hadn't been quite what everyone thought. Lucian had had money to start with, and he had made money, but he had also spent it freely on their living and on polo ponies, planes, and foreign sport cars. Lib found, as she gradually made adjustments, that it was now a case of this *or* that, not this *and* that. She decided, for Dicky's sake, to give up the apartment in town and settle down on the Sharon farm. That was when her life had begun to whirl dizzily.

After a very short time, she rediscovered the fact that she was extremely attractive to men; that she didn't like living alone, that she had to consider Dicky when it came to choosing a stepfather for him and that the one man for whom she had a really deep and abiding affection, Macklyn, was making no move in her direction.

She understood Macklyn. She knew he felt that there would have to be a considerable passage of time before she could choose anyone without loneliness being a strong factor in the choice. She knew he felt that her tastes in life had developed away from his during her marriage to Lucian, that he couldn't change his own way of life for her, and that he wouldn't ask her to change hers for his. But if Macklyn chose to wait, others did not, and that fact forced Lib's hand.

Fred Fowler was the final forcing element. He was a feature writer for a big newspaper syndicate, and he turned up as a house guest of Digby March's. March owned the big, model black Angus farm which bordered Lib's property to the north. At first glance Fowler seemed an unattractive bear of a man. He was tall, almost obese, fat, his clothes sloppy and apparently bought off the rack in a second-hand shop. But he had a great, warm heart, a brilliant mind, and he was almost a genius with Dicky. He could tell endless stories and he seemed somehow to be able

to get on a footing of equality with the small boy. Fowler was staying with Digger March to recuperate, he said, from pneumonia, which had nearly carried him off. Digger March, a bachelor who was some sort of power behind the throne in state politics, was only at home weekends, and Fred Fowler had developed the habit of aiming for Lib's about cocktail time every afternoon. It became apparent to Lib, after a very short time, that he was not simply flirting with her. Fred Fowler had fallen hopelessly in love with her. She knew that any day now the moment would come when Fred would ask her the question that was in his eyes every moment they were together.

It was not a question she could answer lightly. With every word, with every awkward gesture of his big body, Fred Fowler was pleading with her to love him, to marry him, to let him take care of her and Dicky. Without the definite proposal having been made, Lib knew that a refusal from her would be a crushing blow to Fred. He was like a man who had never really loved before. He had a full and exciting life to offer her, a more than comfortable income, and there was Dicky's frank idolatry of him. Lib knew that she had to make sure about Macklyn. Until she was sure of him, she could not say yes to Fred.

And so it was that on a certain day three events happened. She tele-

phoned Macklyn Graves in New York and invited him for the weekend, an invitation he accepted with alacrity. Coming downstairs after making the call, she caught her heel on the stair and fell, fracturing her ankle. And it was that night, while the whole neighborhood came in to console her, that she first heard of the appearance in the valley of the marauding wild-dog pack.

Macklyn was arriving Friday night, and Lib had very much wanted to see him alone that first evening. She was not a little annoyed when Grace and Larry Cuyler barged in with the announcement that Van Anderson, another neighbor, was bringing half a dozen partridges which had been left over in his freezer from last fall's hunting, and that they were going to have a party.

"We can't let the invalid languish on the vine, darling," Grace said. "Digger and Fred Fowler are coming too."

"I'm not languishing on the vine," Lib said, "and I have a house guest coming who—"

"Macklyn Graves!" Grace said. "He's not a house guest. He's a member of the family."

Sitting in the big armchair with her foot propped up on the pillow in front of her, Lib felt as though some perverse and antic leprechaun had stage-managed the evening. She was to make a choice, and all

the choices she had made before this were on hand to pass in review. It was dark and boyish Larry Cuyler who had first reminded her, after Lucian's death, that she was still an attractive woman—Larry, who had a perfectly good wife of his own. Or perhaps that was not quite the right word for Grace, who drank too much, dashed around the countryside in a yellow convertible, was talked about by everyone, and was really not "a perfectly good wife."

"Grace and I go our own ways, and no questions asked," Larry had told her. His technique was to appear just a little helpless and in need of understanding. In a way, Lib was grateful to him for reminding her that she was alive, so she thanked him, figuratively spanked him, and sent him home to Grace—or to where Grace should have been.

Digby March, with his prematurely white hair and his air of distinction, his great wealth and his political affiliations, had been the next serious bidder for Lib's affections. Digger would have ended any financial worries Lib and Dicky had. They would have moved from a small model farm to a huge, highly profitable model farm. There were two difficulties about Digger that made his suit hopeless. Lib admired his positiveness and his vitality, but she felt not the slightest affection for him. And Dicky openly hated him. Digger

had never learned not to be patronizing with children.

Finally there had been Van Anderson, intense, tragic, and with nothing to offer but his heart. There was a Mrs. Van Anderson, and it was generally known that she was in a "retreat" somewhere and that she would never return from it. It was a situation which had pushed Van Anderson slightly off center himself. He had nothing to offer but his desperate need for affection and companionship.

Somehow it seemed as though Van and Digger and the Cuylers were all aware that her relationship with Fred Fowler was reaching a critical point, and that they wanted to be on hand to see the result. Her broken ankle was an excuse, it seemed, never to leave her alone with anyone!

Bob Streeter, a dour man who ran the farm for Lib, had gone to the station to meet Macklyn. By the time Macklyn arrived, the party was going full swing. Larry Cuyler had made the Martinis. Grace, managing to look very attractive with an apron over her dinner dress, had done herself proud with canapés. Van and Digger were consulting on whether to roast the birds or broil them in the electric broiler. Fred Fowler had perched his huge bulk, possessively, on the arm of Lib's chair, having spent a half hour telling Dicky stories until the lad went to sleep.

Macklyn was like a breath of

fresh air. He knew everyone, except Fred Fowler, from past visits, and he greeted them casually. Fowler was something else again. They spotted each other across the room and began shouting at the top of their lungs.

"Fred! Well, I'll be darned."

"Macklyn, baby!" Fowler turned to Lib. "Why didn't you tell me *he* was your house guest?"

"Well, I never dreamed—"

Macklyn and Fowler pounded and swore at each other.

"Army," Macklyn explained.

"Army, my foot!" Fred Fowler bellowed. "Paris, London, Berlin—dancing girls—"

"I do have a hostess to greet," Macklyn managed to say. He came over and took Lib's hand, and for a moment their eyes met, and Lib saw that it was still there—all he had ever felt for her.

Somebody grabbed Fowler and sent him to the kitchen for more ice.

Macklyn appropriated the arm of Lib's chair. "I was petrified when Bob Streeter met me at the station. Is the ankle bad?" he asked.

"Just a nuisance, because it immobilizes me."

"Imagine Fred's being here," Macklyn said. "Where did you run into him?"

"Oh, he's been recuperating here for nearly a month," Lib said. "He's staying with Digger."

"Recuperating?" Macklyn sounded surprised. "From what?"

"Pneumonia."

"He had pneumonia a month ago?"

"Yes."

An odd expression came over Macklyn's face as he passed his cigarettes to Lib. "You know who he is, don't you?"

"He writes for the newspapers. Feature articles."

"Read his stuff?"

Lib smiled. "I've been trying to keep that a secret. His articles come out in an evening paper I don't see here. I've never read a line he's written."

Macklyn's eyes twinkled. "What have you been up to, my girl?"

"Up to?"

"Fred Fowler," Macklyn said, "is a sort of one-man crime commission. He's exposed more crooks in our city government, more racketeers, bookmakers, dishonest policemen, confidence men, and business swindlers than any man alive. And I'll tell you a secret, angel. My guess is he hasn't had pneumonia recently, and if he's invented that kind of a story, it means he's here on business. Or—"

"Or what?"

Macklyn's face seemed to lose its aliveness. "He's in love with you, isn't he? I could see it the moment I stepped into the room. He's a swell guy, Lib."

Fowler brought Macklyn a drink then, and the intimate conversation ended. . . .

Digger and Van Anderson had

decided on the broiler, and while the birds turned slowly on their spits under the broiler heat, the general conversation turned to the wild-dog hunt set up for the next evening. Lib had heard the plans for the wild-dog hunt for several days, but it was new to Macklyn, and he was interested in the scheme. One of the slaughtered calves was to be placed at the north end of the valley and another at the south end. They were to be set out in the late afternoon.

Four groups of hunters, numbering ten or twelve each, were to work along the ridges on either side of the valley, two groups starting at each end and working in toward the bait. The dogs, they believed, would come down out of the hills after nightfall aware that their best chance for food was on the farms after everyone was bedded down. The hunters, working in toward the calves, would make escape from either end of the valley impossible. They would wait in ambush, hoping the dogs would make for the fresh meat. Reports indicated there were from fifteen to eighteen dogs in the outlaw group and that they didn't always run together.

The hunters feared most the possibility that the dogs might have come upon deer in the hills and run them down. Their tactic was to chase a deer until it was slowed down by exhaustion; then they would hamstring the animal by bit-

ing through its leg tendons. The helpless deer was easy prey then. If the dogs had fed off deer, they might not risk coming down into the valley after the slaughtered calves.

"We've tried hunting them in the daytime," Van Anderson explained to Macklyn, who had expressed doubts as to the sinister nature of the dogs and had been told all the stories of their recent violent sorties. "You won't see hide nor hair of them by day."

"But I thought you said they attacked two men?" Macklyn reminded Anderson.

"It was twilight," Van said. "The men had been cutting wood up on the west ridge, and it was almost dark when they started home."

Digger March glanced at Fred Fowler, who had become strangely silent in the last half hour. "You've uncovered some pretty vicious characters in your time, Fred, but when you see these dogs you'll be looking at just about the most treacherous and bloodthirsty killers you've encountered. A wolf, for all he's dangerous, has a degree of nobility to him. But a dog gone wrong—"

"—is like a man gone wrong," Fred Fowler said, quietly. "The basest thing on earth because his potential for good is so great."

The guests left, and at last the time came that Lib had been waiting for. Macklyn Graves came back

into the living room from seeing them off. He stood with his back to the fire, looking down at Lib thoughtfully.

"Nightcap?" she suggested.

"That'll just about do it," Macklyn said. "This country air!" He went over to the big center table and made two drinks. He gave her hers and still stood there, looking at her. "Should we drink a special toast?" he asked.

"To what?"

"You and Fred," he said, quietly.

"He hasn't asked me any important question," Lib said.

"Does he have to? You know what's on his mind, Lib. He's waiting for some sign from you that when he does ask you, the answer will be yes."

"Should I marry Fred?" Lib asked. She couldn't be certain, but she thought she saw a nerve twitch in Macklyn's cheek.

"I can't answer that question," Macklyn told her.

"You're the only friend I have I could discuss it with," Lib said.

Macklyn turned away toward the fire. "I should think I would be the last," he said.

"Why, Macklyn?"

"If there's anything I would have said about you, Lib, without reservation," Macklyn said, "it's that you wouldn't play games with any man's affection."

"I haven't played games with Fred," Lib said. "When I began to know how he felt, I had to let him

keep coming here. I had to find out how I felt myself."

"I wasn't talking about Fred," Macklyn said.

"Macklyn!"

He turned on her, almost angrily. "Ever since I've known you, I've had to play the role of somebody's best friend. First it was Lucian, now Fred."

"Macklyn. I—"

"I don't like the role, and I don't intend to play it any longer," Macklyn said. "I have my own emotions, my own life. I've waited for the time to arrive when you could look at me as a man, disassociated from Lucian and from the past. Apparently I waited too long, and Fred has got there ahead of me. Fred is a swell guy. I haven't even the luxury of thinking he's a heel and being able to run him down to you."

"Macklyn, please listen to me."

"Yes?"

"I asked you here, didn't I?"

"Yes. So that I could see for myself how matters stood."

"Yes," Lib said.

"Well, I've seen," Macklyn said. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll turn in."

"Macklyn!"

He had started for the door, and he stopped and turned back. "Yes?"

"The trouble is you haven't seen," Lib said. He stood there, with a puzzled frown on his face. "Darn you, Macklyn, do I have to say it?"

"Spell it out for me, you mean?"

No."

"Macklyn, you stinker," she said, "don't you understand that I'm trying to tell you that I love you?"

Macklyn was in something of a daze after that. There was long, meaningless, wonderful talk—the talk of people who have suddenly discovered each other and want to touch each other, mentally and physically, to make sure their feeling is real. It was almost daybreak when they finally said good night, with, it seemed, almost nothing talked about. Fred would have to be told. He had the right to honest treatment from Lib.

But the next day the place seemed to be swarming with people almost before they were up. The Crowder farm was to be the starting point for the hunters who would work the northeast end of the valley. Young Dicky was wild with excitement. He had no time for Macklyn or even for his hero, Fred Fowler. The hunters assembled in the late afternoon. Most of them were friends of Lib's, and almost all of them came in to see her and inquire about her ankle. Macklyn and Lib had no chance for the private talk they wanted so much.

About 4, the hunters started on foot. Lib and Macklyn still weren't alone, because of Dicky. It would be two or three hours before Dicky finally had his supper and was trundled off to bed by Gertrude, the house maid. Dicky was one of the problems they had to discuss before anything was made public.

Dicky would have to be told and somehow made to understand, and to approve of Macklyn.

About 6, Gertrude brought the ice bucket and the mixings for Martinis in from the pantry, and Macklyn was just starting to prepare them when Dicky came pounding in in a high state of alarm. Sorrowful was missing.

"He can't be very far off, Dicky. He never leaves the place," Lib said, trying to reassure the child.

Dicky's round, pink face was screwed into an absurdly tragic expression. "With so many people going off, Mum! And Sorrow *is* a hunting dog."

"I'll help you have another look for him," Macklyn said cheerfully, and he and the boy went out.

It's a conspiracy! Lib thought dryly. She and Macklyn would never have a chance to get details settled.

Fifteen minutes later they came back, with Dicky in tears. Macklyn looked at Lib with raised eyebrows. "The pooch seems to have taken off somewhere."

Dicky fought manfully for control. "Bob said any dog that was caught out tonight wouldn't stand a chance," he said, "Bob said they'd shoot 'em on sight, Mum."

"Well, I suppose they would if they don't recognize the dog," Lib said. "But your Uncle Van and Uncle Digger and Uncle Fred all know him by sight. And Bob's with them. Sorrowful would go right up to Bob, wouldn't he?"

"If he got right up to them," Dicky said. "But it's almost dark; they might not see him before it was too late."

"I'm sure he didn't follow them," Lib said, not sure at all. "He's probably found himself a woodchuck somewhere."

"We'd hear him barking if he had a woodchuck," Dicky said.

"I'm sure he's all right, darling. Now you go get ready for bed. Gertrude will help you."

"I'd like to look once more," Dicky said.

"I'll keep an eye out for him, Dicky," Macklyn said. "As soon as he turns up, I'll bring him up to your room to you."

"Even if I'm asleep?"

"Even if you're asleep."

"Now run along to Gertrude, Dicky," Lib said.

Dicky trudged slowly off toward the kitchen.

"Poor Dicky," Lib said. "It will be awful for him if anything happens to Sorrowful."

"Might he have gone off with the hunters?" Macklyn asked.

Lib frowned. "Bob Streeter's been training him for Dicky. If Sorrow saw Bob going off with a gun under his arm, he *might* have gone after him."

Macklyn had just got the Martinis mixed and poured when Gertrude came in from the kitchen looking for Dicky.

"I just sent him out to you—five minutes ago," Lib said. . . .

So Dicky was missing now. It *was* a conspiracy! Macklyn would have to go hunt for him, that was all there was to it. The first search was just around the place with Gertrude helping. But Dicky was nowhere around, it seemed, and Macklyn reported back to Lib with the unhappy conclusion that the boy must have set off after the hunters. The result was that Macklyn, reluctantly armed with Lib's shotgun, had set out to find him.

Half an hour after Macklyn had left, Dicky, rubbing sleepy eyes, came walking blandly in the front door.

"Dicky!" Lib said, trying not to sound angry.

"Sorrowful's shut up in the old milkhouse, Mum. Bob must have put him there before they started out."

"Didn't you hear us calling you, Dicky?"

"I—I went into the milkhouse, Mum, and lay down on an old blanket, with Sorrow," Dicky said. "He was awful glad to see me, Mum, and I guess I must of fallen asleep."

"Your Uncle Macklyn's out in the woods looking for you."

"Gee, Mum, I'm sorry. I just *had* to look for Sorrow once more, and when I found him—"

Lib sighed. "Well, off to bed with you, young man."

The relief at Dicky's return delayed Lib's recognition of a slowly mounting anxiety for Macklyn. It

was when the clock on the mantel showed her that Macklyn had been gone nearly three hours that Lib's anxiety turned sharply into fear.

Macklyn screamed and screamed again. The monster, crouching over the man's body, lifted its head to look at Macklyn, without flinching or turning away. The terror, which had frozen Macklyn where he stood, now seemed to galvanize him into unreasoning action. The man down there was alive, and the dog must be got away from him. Even if he could have loaded the gun, Macklyn knew he wouldn't have dared fire it. His aim under the calmest circumstances would not have been reliable. If he had time to load and fire at the dog, he might quite easily kill the man he was trying to save.

*After all it was just a dog—a mongrel dog!*

Macklyn charged down the embankment into the clearing, waving his useless gun, shouting something unintelligible, meant to sound commanding, at the dog. Surely the yellow-eyed brute would turn tail and run in the face of Macklyn's arm-waving charge and shouting voice.

It did no such thing. It stood over the body, head half raised, hackles bristling along its spine.

Macklyn stopped. He was impelled to stop by those baleful yellow eyes that seemed, at close range, to glow like fire. Then the dog moved, slowly, tentatively, a step at

a time—*toward Macklyn!* Suddenly, the moon was gone and it was pitch dark.

Thought processes undoubtedly took place in Macklyn's mind then. He could have sworn, afterward, that he weighed very carefully and judicially what he should do. He had the dog's attention now, God help him. If he could manage to get away and take the dog with him, the wounded man who lay just beyond him on the ground might be saved—if other dogs didn't come to the feast. If he thought those thoughts, it took him one second to veer off to his left and run into the blackness of the woods. He had not, it seemed, had time to think one all-important thought. He couldn't go fifty feet without being overhauled by the dog.

And the dog was coming after him.

It was crazy, despairing flight. He crashed into a tree, bounced off it, and went staggering through brush that tore cruelly at his face and hands, and the snarl of the dog was loud in his ears. The ground rose in front of him, and he went staggering up the slope, fell to his knees, and the dog was on him. Toenails, like steel claws, tore at the back of his neck and he could smell a hot, fetid breath that seemed to envelop him like a poison gas.

In the brief, hopeless flight, Macklyn had clung without reason to the unloaded gun. It was in his right hand, and he drove the butt

backward with all his might. He could hear the grunt of the huge dog as the weapon struck him full in the stomach. The immense weight fell away from Macklyn's back for an instant.

The woods were full of an incredible sound which Macklyn realized was his own blubbering screech for help. For a moment he was free to move, and for a moment the moon reappeared. A brief glance over his shoulder showed Macklyn the dog picking himself up slowly from where he had fallen.

What it is that makes a man act with complete stupidity through most of a crisis, with only a moment here and there of absolute clarity, is for the psychiatrists to explain. In this moment of his extremity, Macklyn had an instant of cool, clear reason. He had staggered to his nearest limb, gripped it, and swung feet close to a tree with low-browsing branches. He reached up to the nearest limb, gripped it, and swung his feet up. At the same moment he was nearly wrenched away from below.

The dog had jumped for him, and his teeth had fastened in the loose folds of Macklyn's trench coat. The dog yanked and pulled like a fighting tarpon on the end of a deep-sea fisherman's line. The palms of Macklyn's hands were rubbed clean of skin as he clung for his life.

Then the coat gave way with a tearing of cloth, and with his last

ounce of strength Macklyn pulled himself up onto the limb of the tree, just as the dog leaped for him again. Hanging on with one arm to the trunk of the tree, Macklyn jammed his foot hard against the dog's shoulder and sent him tumbling down into the underbrush. Then Macklyn climbed three or four limbs higher to safety. He stood looking down into a small patch of moonlight.

The dog crouched there, looking up at Macklyn. Just behind the dog, in the snow, lay the gun.

Pain was a part of the moment. Macklyn looked down at his raw and bleeding hands. He was shaking from the exertion of his climb. He reached up and gingerly touched the back of his neck where the dog's claws had raked at him. His fingertips came away wet with more blood. His whole body was bruised and aching from his violent collision with the tree.

Split-second decisions were no longer necessary. From his place of safety Macklyn could consider exactly what his next move should be. He knew he had been shouting at the top of his lungs and that there had been no answering shouts. Perhaps the same trick of the wind that had made the railroad seem so close had kept his voice from carrying to the hunters who were scattered through the woods. If he had been able to hang on to the gun, there would now have been time to discover how it loaded and fire it

until the shots brought some of the others. But the gun lay in the snow just behind the dog.

The dog was evidently doing his own thinking, because now he tried to do something. He crouched for a moment and then ran at the tree. His momentum carried him, scratching and clawing, a few feet up the trunk. He actually managed to get his front paws over the lowest limb and hang there, trying to get a hold with his back feet. But after a moment he fell to the ground with a heavy thud. Watching him, fascinated, Macklyn guessed that he must weigh close to a hundred pounds.

Macklyn's concern was no longer for himself. He was safe here in the tree, and sooner or later someone would come. If he couldn't get help by periodic shouting, the hunters would discover he was missing when they got back to Lib's and would come searching for him. He was safe. It was cold, but not so cold that there was any danger of freezing. When the arm and hand with which he clung to the tree trunk grew a little numb, he could shift his position and cling with the other arm while circulation was restored in the numb member. He could stand or he could sit. He could hold out here for a good many hours, if he had to.

But there was urgent need for action long before that. The man back there in the clearing was badly hurt. He needed help at once, even if Macklyn could keep the dog's inter-

est until someone came. If the dog realized that Macklyn was lost to him, he might very well go back to the clearing to the helpless man. And where there was one dog, there might be more close at hand. They might already have crept into the clearing now that there was no one there to drive them off.

Macklyn watched the dog as if somehow, by concentrating on him, he could read the beast's mind. After a few moments the dog turned his head toward the clearing, his nose lifted as if he were sniffing the meal that waited for him there. Macklyn tore a small branch off the tree and threw it down at the dog. Instantly, the animal's attention returned to him, and the dog came to the foot of the tree, snarling.

Macklyn drew a deep breath and shouted at the top of his lungs. "Help! Help!" Then his heart seemed to nearly jam out between his ribs. From far away there was an answering "Hello-o-o."

Macklyn shouted again, a shout that ended in a strangled cough.

The dog stood like a statue at the base of the tree, listening, as the answer came again. It seemed just a little louder, a little closer. The dog couldn't find another branch he could break off the tree. He fumbled in the pocket of his torn coat and found the handful of shells for the gun. He threw one at the dog and made a lucky hit. For a moment or two the dog's interest returned to Macklyn.

Macklyn shouted once more, and this time the answer seemed quite close. The dog froze where he was, his head turned back toward the clearing. Then, slowly, cautiously, he started toward it. Macklyn shouted at him, but the dog paid no attention. Then, suddenly he stopped. Macklyn could hear what had stopped him. Someone was coming through the bushes, evidently running.

Macklyn gave it all he had. "Look out!" he shouted. "One of the dogs is right here. A killer! Look out!"

Almost at the same instant a figure broke through the brush about twenty yards away. In the moonlight Macklyn could see him clearly. It was Van Anderson, his red hunter's cap pushed back on his head. He had a repeating rifle gripped in his hand.

"Van! Look out! To your left. Your left!"

Van turned and saw the dog, which quite deliberately was moving toward the man with the gun. The rifle went to Van's shoulder, and the dog rushed him at the same instant. The first shot threw the dog down as though he'd been slugged over the head, but he scrambled up again, snarling with rage. He was on his way toward Van again, one front leg dragging. Coldly, systematically, Van pumped bullets into the dog. The great creature rose up on his hind legs like some grotesque ballet dancer, clawed and bit at the air, and then toppled over

into a snow-filled gully, twitched for a moment, and lay still.

Macklyn started to laugh, crazily, as he attempted to climb down the tree. Halfway down, he lost his hold and fell. For a moment consciousness left him.

When he came to, Van Anderson was kneeling beside him, his arm around Macklyn's shoulders, trying to force the nozzle of a brandy flask between Macklyn's lips.

"God, Macklyn, what happened to you? What are you doing out here?" Perhaps it was the reflection from the snow that made Van's sharp, ascetic face look so pale.

"No time to explain," Macklyn muttered. "Back there in the clearing there's a man, badly hurt." He struggled to his feet with Van's help. There seemed to be many voices shouting now in the surrounding woods. Van's gun had done the trick.

Every movement Macklyn made was agony, but by clinging to Van's arm he was able to stagger back toward the clearing. It had seemed to him in his flight from the dog that he had covered miles. Actually it wasn't more than fifty or sixty yards. As they struggled through the brush Macklyn told his story, disjointedly.

"Dicky—I came looking for him. His dog followed Bob Streeter. I —"

"But Bob locked the dog in the milkhouse. I saw him!" Van said.

"Then we were wrong. But Dicky

set out to find him. I came after—got to clearing—then that dog came. I thought, in moonlight, it was one of the calves that you'd set out for bait."

"That's what *is* there," Van said.

"No! The dog started to tear at it. It moved—I could see clearly—a man was thrashing about with a free arm. I ran down there to distract the dog—gun wasn't loaded—"

Macklyn stumbled over the remains of an ancient stone wall and into the clearing. The black heap in the center of it lay still now, motionlessly. Macklyn broke away from Van and staggered toward it. He knelt beside it and reached for it. Then he cried out.

He was kneeling beside the butchered carcass of a black Angus calf.

For the second time in the space of five minutes, Macklyn slipped into unconsciousness. When he opened his eyes again, someone was calling his name, almost tenderly. It was Fred Fowler. The big newspaperman was sitting in the snow, holding Macklyn in his arms and rocking him gently back and forth. The little clearing was crowded with hunters now, and somebody was pointing an electric torch at Macklyn, which blinded him as he opened his eyes.

"We can make a stretcher for him out of some of our jackets," someone said.

"I can walk," Macklyn said, strug-

gling up to a sitting position. "You don't understand what's happened here. It's not as simple as it looks."

Fred Fowler smiled at him, a smile of relief. "You had the hell scared out of you, boy. That's what happened here."

"Can't say I blame you, Macklyn." It was Digger March. "That brute would have scared me out of ten years' growth, if I'd met him alone."

The men gathered around. Macklyn moved, and he saw the dog. Its legs had been trussed to a pole which two men carried over their shoulders. The dog's back dragged on the earth.

"Listen," Macklyn said in a croaking voice. "I don't know what's going on here, but I tell you, when I first came to this clearing, there was a man lying where that calf is. I saw him move. I heard him cry out."

"Have a cigarette," Fowler said. He took a lighted one from his mouth and put it between Macklyn's lips.

"Did you have a flashlight with you, Macklyn?" Van Anderson asked.

"No, but the moon was bright. I tell you—"

"Where were you when you saw all this, baby?" Fowler asked.

Macklyn twisted around and pointed to the top of the low embankment where he had been sitting, smoking a cigarette, when the horror began.

"A good fifteen yards," Digger said.

"I don't care if it was fifteen miles," Macklyn said desperately. "The moon made it bright as daylight. *I thought* it was a calf at first—it was just a black heap. Then the dog came and started to tear at it, and I saw it wasn't a calf. I heard him groan, and I saw him thrash out with his arm. I screamed. That's when I attracted the dog's attention, got him interested in me."

A strange voice whispered off to the side. "Shock. Can't blame him. That dog was a real killer."

"It's not shock, and I wasn't seeing things!" Macklyn cried. "There was a man here. I don't know what's happened to him. I don't know who brought the calf here and took him away—"

"The calf was brought here about half-past three this afternoon," Digger said. "It's been here ever since, Macklyn. I tell you, old man, it's just that the whole experience got your imagination working overtime."

"Take it easy, baby," Fowler said, as Macklyn struggled to his feet and faced the semicircle of hunters.

"So I'm crazy," he said. "But I wasn't crazy when I sat on that rock up there, resting. I was lost, but I wasn't crazy. I saw the dog, and he scared the hell out of me. My gun wasn't loaded, and I wasn't sure I knew how to load it. I sat there, still as a mouse, hoping the dog would get interested in—in—

the—the calf and not me! He did, and I thought I could get my gun loaded and fire at him. Then I heard that groan—not from the dog but from—whatever it was there. The dog pounced on him, and I saw his arm thrash out, trying to protect himself. Do you think, if I hadn't been *sure*, I'd have run down into this clearing with an empty gun and no way to protect myself?—I was trying to defend that guy who was too badly hurt to defend himself!"

"It was a trick of the moonlight," Van said. "The dog's action made the carcass move somehow."

"It was a hand! I saw the *fingers* on it!"

For the first time Macklyn became aware of Bob Streeter, Lib's hired man. "Just so Mr. Graves'll rest easier," he said, "we can count heads here. Is anyone missing?"

A quick count was taken, and all eleven hunters who had set out to work the northeast side of the valley were present.

"Course someone could have worked over from the other side, though it was understood no one would, so's to avoid accident."

"I don't care if every hunter in all four groups is accounted for," Macklyn protested. "So it was a tramp or a stranger or God knows who. But don't you see what's happened here? The calf was right here at 3:30, you say. Well, someone took the calf away and put a man there. And in the time that damn'

dog and I were playing hide-and-seek, someone took the man away and brought back the calf!"

There was a moment of dead silence.

"We'd better get him back to the house," Van Anderson said. Fred Fowler reached out gently for Macklyn's arm.

Macklyn wrenched away from him. He ran, unsteadily, toward one edge of the clearing. "Here! You can see where the bodies of the calf and the man were dragged in and out." There were clear markings of the draggings in the snow.

"We couldn't get within about a hundred yards of here on that old logging road in the jeep," Digger March explained to anyone who cared to listen. "We hauled the calf in from there and walked back to the jeep the way we came."

"At 3:30 this afternoon!" Macklyn's voice sounded strangely triumphant. He was about fifteen yards away from the group, near the edge of the clearing, bending down. "How do you account for this, then?"

Only Fowler went to join him, placating, gentle. "What is it, baby?"

"On this stone!" Macklyn said. "Fresh blood! It's still wet, Fred. Look at it! I insist you look at it! Would there still be wet blood on this stone from a carcass dragged over it *nine hours ago*?"

The fire had been built up in Lib's living room, and Macklyn

had been forced to take the chair that had been Lib's. She sat on the pillow, her crutches on the floor beside her. The room was full of people, and again Grace Cuyler and her husband had taken over. Hot coffee and drinks were being served. Crowded around Macklyn's chair were Fred Fowler and Van and Digger. Dr. Jelliffe had been called in to check Macklyn over.

Macklyn was furious. They had treated him like a child or a harmless idiot, out there in the woods. They had looked at the wet blood on the stone, and they had mumbled about it, and then, as if he needed humoring, they had gone through the motions of searching the woods for a radius of about a hundred yards. Then they had insisted on bringing Macklyn home.

Dr. Jelliffe had dressed Macklyn's torn hands and bandaged them, and he had, laughing as he did it, examined Macklyn's head for injury. "You fell a couple of times," he said. "You might have a concussion, Mr. Graves."

"I didn't fall on my head," Macklyn said angrily, "and I'm not crazy, whatever these idiots may try to tell you." Only the feel of Lib's hand on his arm kept him from blowing his top entirely. He looked at her and remembered there had been an understanding between them long, long ago. It seemed like forever since he had arrived from New York the night before.

"Lib, darling," he said, quietly,

"they're trying to brush me off, but I know what I saw!"

No one wanted to listen. Everybody was talking about the hunt. It seemed that the main pack of dogs had been drawn on the bait at the other end of the valley. The men stationed there had shot thirteen of them, and the one Van had gotten —known as "Macklyn's dog"— made fourteen. There could be only three or four left, and they were probably the least dangerous.

Macklyn sat silent, sipping a bourbon Fred had brought. Then he excused himself and struggled out of his chair.

"Where you going, baby?" Fred said.

"Do we have to make a production out of my going to the bathroom?" Macklyn said sharply.

"Don't be sore, baby," Fred said.

But Macklyn had no intention of going to the bathroom. Instead he went to the telephone at the rear of the entrance hall. He asked for the state troopers' barracks in Canaan.

"My name is Macklyn Graves," he told the officer who answered the telephone. "I'm staying at the Crowder farm north of Sharon. I want to report a murder . . . No, I won't go anywhere."

He limped back to the chair in the living room. Van Anderson was standing by Lib. "I've been telling Lib you're a damn' brave guy, Macklyn. You *thought* there was a man there. You risked your life to save him."

Fred brought Macklyn a second drink. "Get to work, baby," he said. "We're getting you drunk, didn't you know? Doctor's orders."

Larry Cuyler was at the piano playing old-time jazz. People stood around the piano singing. It was all very gay.

It was so gay that the two state troopers, who were admitted by one of the guests, were quite puzzled. They asked for Macklyn, and the instant they were seen, the music stopped and people crowded around. "Who sent for you?" Digger asked.

"A Mr. Macklyn Graves."

"Oh, brother!" someone said, at the far end of the room.

Digger brought the troopers over to where Macklyn sat, "You phoned for the state police, Macklyn?"

"Yes," Macklyn said.

"I'm Sergeant Jackson," one of the troopers said. "You reported a murder over the phone."

"That's right, Sergeant."

"Look, Sergeant," Digger said. From his tone of voice it was clear he represented a special kind of authority. "Mr. Graves is suffering from shock. He—"

"I want to report a murder," Macklyn said grimly.

"Who is the victim?" Jackson asked.

"I don't know."

"Where is the body?"

"I don't know."

Jackson held his pencil poised over his black notebook.

"I'd like to tell you what happened, if it can be done without interruption," Macklyn said.

"Is there some place—" Jackson said, looking around.

"The study across the hall," Lib said.

Macklyn went there with the two troopers. Jackson sat at the desk and Macklyn sat in a red-leather chair, facing him. The other trooper stood by the door.

"When I get through telling you," Macklyn said, "you may agree with the others that I am crazy. But I'd be doing less than my duty as a citizen if I didn't tell you."

"Go ahead, Mr. Graves."

So Macklyn told the story from beginning to end. "We found fresh blood where the calf and the man had been dragged into the clearing," he said as he finished. "I say it came from the body of the man who was alive or had only just died when he was taken out of the clearing and replaced by the calf."

Jackson's voice had an odd sound to it. "The others don't agree?"

"The others," Macklyn said, "say it may have been the dog's blood. That he might have been wounded before they actually got him. They say"—and Macklyn spoke with emphasis—"that it might have been *my* blood—that it dripped off my neck or hands right then, while I was searching."

"I see," Jackson said. He closed the notebook. "We'll search the location, Mr. Graves. And we'll check

the surrounding communities for news of someone missing. If there was a murder, someone is missing somewhere."

"Unless it was a tramp, someone like that," the trooper by the door said.

Macklyn turned his head. "If it was a tramp, why the elaborate effort to remove the carcass of the calf and replace it with the man, and then remove the man and replace him with the calf?"

"If that happened," the trooper said.

"It happened," Macklyn said grimly.

Jackson drummed his pencil on the edge of the desk. "Why do you think someone did that, Mr. Graves?" he asked.

Macklyn was suddenly almost too tired to talk and more. "I think the murderer intended it should seem the man he killed had been run down and destroyed by the dogs. I think there is evidence the man was murdered. Suppose he was strangled. The dogs would tear out his throat first thing, from what I hear. That would destroy the evidence of strangulation. Not autopsy evidence, perhaps, but no one would have thought of an autopsy. Right?"

"Go on," Jackson said.

"But I saw the body before the dog could destroy the evidence. I kept the dog from destroying it. So the murderer had to remove the body again. He brought back the

carcass of the calf, and it's worked out perfectly for him. Everybody's satisfied I was frightened into a piece of gaudy imagination. I wasn't. And when you find the body you'll find evidence that the man was murdered. I'll bet everything I own on that."

"You've no idea who the man was?"

"Not the slightest. I never saw his face. The chances are, being a stranger here, I wouldn't know him."

Jackson stood up. "We'll check," he said. "Do you expect to be around for a while, Mr. Graves?"

"Till this is settled," he said.

"I guess that's all for now," Jackson announced.

The troopers went straight across the entrance hall and out the front door without talking to anyone else. Macklyn watched them go, and he was angry all over again. Why hadn't they questioned some of the other hunters? Had Digger March convinced them that this was all just a pipe dream?

Fred Fowler came out of the living room to where Macklyn stood, carrying his own glass and Macklyn's. "You've done what you could, baby," he said. "Drink up."

Macklyn took the glass from him, raised it, and drained it. He shuddered slightly and then looked up at Fowler. "Tell me, you fat slob, in what New York night club did you enjoy that case of pneumonia you're supposed to be recuperating from?"

Fowler looked back at him without blinking. "A literary-type guy like you ought to know better than to end a sentence with a preposition," he said.

Exhaustion works in peculiar ways. Tensions had held Macklyn together until after the troopers left. The combination of their going and the whiskey Fred had brought seemed to end his control. The room began to spin almost at once, and ten minutes later he realized he was being helped to bed by Fred and Van Anderson.

He thought once that he heard the sound of laughter and of cars driving away, and then, in the next conscious moment he had, the sun was streaming through the windows of his bedroom and young Dicky was standing by his bed shaking him gently. His eyes were bright with excitement.

"The state troopers are here to see you, Uncle Macklyn."

"Oh." The night's adventure came back to him, even more sharply when he tried to move. He felt bruised from head to foot.

"Mum says Gertrude will bring you a tray and you can see the troopers here," Dicky said.

"No need," Macklyn said. "I'll be down in ten minutes."

With his bruised and stiffened fingers, dressing was difficult, but he managed everything except the tying of a bow tie.

Downstairs, the two troopers were having coffee at the dining-

room table with Lib and the seemingly ever-present Fred Fowler. "Hi, baby," Fred said. "How do you feel?"

"In one piece," Macklyn said. "Lib, you'll have to tie my tie for me." He bent down in front of her and looked into her dark blue eyes, and the day was new and good.

"Well, Sergeant?" he said to Jackson.

"We just wanted to report, Mr. Graves," Jackson said. "We started a search of the location at daybreak. There's no sign of a body, nor any sign of anyone's having been dragged around anywhere. Of course, that old road was pretty well tramped."

"Oh you don't have to tell me the rest" Macklyn said. "Nobody's missing. Right?"

"That's the way it is, sir," Jackson said. He fiddled with his coffee cup. "We thought perhaps, after you'd had a night's rest, and the shock of the experience was over—"

"I saw what I saw," Macklyn said.

Jackson sighed deeply. "We haven't got anything to go on, Mr. Graves, except your word."

"Which has always been good," Macklyn said.

"Don't misunderstand me, sir," Jackson said. "We don't doubt for a instant that you're telling the truth as you saw it. Only, all things considered, it's possible it really didn't happen the way you think it did."

"You're dropping the case?"

"We've sent out a request to all state police and sheriffs' offices in the area, both Connecticut and New York, for immediate information on any missing persons reported."

"And you've given up the search for the body?"

"If they moved it around as handy as you say they did," the other trooper blurted out, "they probably moved it out of the woods by now." He sounded again like he was talking to a loony.

"You intend to do anything more about it, sir?" Jackson asked.

"I intend to clear it up, Sergeant, with or without your help."

The troopers looked at each other, then thanked Lib for the coffee, and went out.

Macklyn sat down at the table. "I could eat a horse," he said. "I didn't have any dinner last night."

Gertrude was sent for, and she brought fruit juice and coffee.

Fred Fowler leaned back in his chair, the ash from his cigarette dribbling down over his vast expanse of stomach. "You're a revelation, baby," he said. "I've always thought of you as the one who sat at home, listening to your classical records, studying your target designs. And now I find you determined to play bloodhound."

"Listen, Fred, I'm sick of everybody treating me as if I were nuts. There was murder done out there last night. If no one believes me, then I have no choice but to follow through."

Fred puffed on his cigarette. "Does it occur to you, baby, that you may be setting yourself up as a clay pigeon?"

"It does," Macklyn said.

"What does that mean?" Lib asked.

"If there was a murder," Fred said, "Macklyn's the only hitch in the murderer's getting away with it."

Lib's eyes widened. "Macklyn!"

"So what do I do?" Macklyn said impatiently, "Give up because it's dangerous, and let a killer go free?"

Fred took another cigarette from his pocket and lighted it from the stub of the one he had been smoking. "You've got yourself a good boy, Lib," he said. Then he laughed.

"You don't have to look so surprised. I saw I had to throw in the towel the minute Macklyn got here last night. Make her happy, Macklyn, or I'll wring your neck for you. And one way to make her happy is not to run foolish risks."

"Here we go again," Macklyn said.

Gertrude came in with a heaping plate of bacon, eggs, and toast, and Fred was silent till she had gone back to the kitchen.

"You asked me a question last night which I didn't answer. You're right, I've never had pneumonia."

"Fred!" Lib said.

"Oh, it's nothing sinister," the fat man said. "I needed a holiday. Whenever I go any place without a good reason, people pull in their

sidewalks and lock their doors. They think I'm investigating them or their neighbors. So when Digger invited me to come here, we spread the story that I'd been sick and was here to recuperate. That was so the good people of your valley wouldn't think I was here to look under someone's bed."

Lib laughed. "You double-talker!"

Fred looked at her. "I'd have been gone long ago, but I fell in love, Mrs. Crowder, and I had hopes."

"Fred, dear, I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about. I asked you nothing, and you promised me nothing." Fowler pushed back his chair noisily and rose. "Take care of your woman, baby," he said to Macklyn, "and stop playing cops and robbers."

Then he turned and left them.

It would have been easy for Macklyn to follow Fowler's advice. He had done his duty as a citizen, technically. He had notified the authorities of what he'd seen, and the authorities had chosen to believe it was only his imagination. His conscience should have let Macklyn drop it there.

"But I can't," he said to Lib, after Fred had left them. "If we go on living here, as I suppose you'll want; to, something may happen tomorrow or next week or next month that'll put two and two together, and we'll be back in it again."

Lib's eyes had a twinkle in them.

"You talk about our living here, Macklyn, and you haven't even asked me to marry you."

"Lib!"

"Darling."

"Last night—Lord, it was night before last night, wasn't it—I thought—"

"It is typically male," Lib said, "to take everything for granted."

"A respectable widow with a small son! You're not suggesting—"

"It doesn't happen every day," Lib said. "A girl has a right to a formal proposal of marriage."

"The classic style is out," Macklyn said. "I couldn't bend my knees far enough to kneel."

"Poor darling," Lib said.

Looking at her, the comedy went out of it for Macklyn. He felt suddenly choked with what he felt for her. "Words have been my business for so long they have a way of becoming meaningless, Lib," he said, very quietly.

"Say the words anyway, darling."

"I love you, Lib," he said.

"And I love you, Macklyn."

"I've always loved you."

"I've been in love before, Macklyn," Lib said. "I loved Lucian."

"Of course."

"But because I've been in love before, Macklyn, I think I know now how to love more than I could then."

He went quickly around the table to her and took her hands in his. "Will you marry me, Lib?"

She laughed a little. "I always imagined I'd take this standing, but this blasted ankle—"

He lifted her up out of her chair and held her close to him. "Darling," he whispered. "Darling, darling, darling."

He finally went back to his place—and to the cold bacon and eggs.

Over his second cup-of coffee and a cigarette, he was back at the problem that worried at him. "What about Van Anderson?" he asked.

"What about him?"

"He was there before anyone, Lib. He shot the dog. It was some time before any of the other hunters appeared."

"Macklyn, how can you speculate about anyone, darling? You can't guess at a motive when you don't know who was killed. Van is a hot-tempered, reckless guy who might kill someone under the right set of circumstances. But so might you, darling—under the right set of circumstances. Until you know who's dead, you can't try to guess why it happened. And as the trooper said—

"Yes?"

"The body of the man who was killed may be far away from here by now. There's been time."

Macklyn stood up. "I don't think so," he said. "It couldn't have been safely moved last night. Anyone's absence would have been noticed. The troopers have been on the job since then. I don't think anyone's going to try it by daylight now."

He turned to Lib. "Did your shotgun get returned in the excitement last night?"

"Van brought it back."

"Show me how it works. I'm going for a walk," Macklyn said.

Bob Streeter and Dicky were on the front lawn when Macklyn appeared with Lib's shotgun, loaded this time, under his arm. The boy and the farmer were working on Sorrowful, who was being taught to walk at heel. Macklyn stopped to watch.

"How you feeling today, Mr. Graves?" Streeter asked.

"As well as can be expected, to use a medical term." Macklyn said. "I wish I'd known you'd locked that pup in the milkhouse last night. It would have saved me quite a workout."

"I was afraid he'd follow me," Streeter said. "Because I've been helping to train him, he hasn't made up his mind yet between me and Dicky."

"Where will I find the beginning of that logging road, Bob?"

"You going back out there?"

"Just want to look around."

"You go down here to the first break in the stone wall," Streeter began. Macklyn watched his fine, almost aristocratic face, so typical of many of these country people, the ones who knew each stone, each rise of ground, each clump of bushes. ". . . and when you come to a tree that's all wrapped round with

bittersweet, you'll see the beginning of the road just off to the left of where you are."

"Do you think I was seeing things last night, Bob?"

Streeter looked away over the countryside. "I'm a countryman, Mr. Graves. I started hunting in these woods over thirty years ago." He chuckled. "I've hunted in 'em often at night, which ain't legal. But if a fellow needs a piece of venison to eat . . ." He let his breath out in a long sigh. "I've seen things in the woods I never mentioned to no one. They wouldn't of believed me. And after a while I didn't believe 'em myself. You'll see how it is, Mr. Graves. A month from now—six months from now—you'll begin to wonder if you really saw what you think you saw." He looked straight at Macklyn. "It's easier that way, Mr. Graves."

A faint chill ran along Macklyn's spine. "I hope you're right," he said. "But I'm off to have a look when there aren't so many shadows."

Go to the first break in the stone wall, up a rise of ground, bear right along the edge of a piece of boggy land, through a wire fence—and there was the dead apple tree, with the bittersweet wound round it like the coils of a snake. The bright orange berries rustled in a brisk, cool breeze. Off to the left Macklyn saw the old logging road . . .

It was strange, but in the darkness the night before, he had been so concerned with his search for Dicky

that the woods had not disturbed him. Now, as he walked slowly along the logging road, he had an inclination to turn back. The wind blew in little gusts, shaking some of the brown leaves that still clung to the trees. The sun seemed to be shut out, and the light was bleak.

Macklyn could see the tracks of the snow tires of the jeep that had brought in the calf's carcass, and the many footprints of the hunters who had come and gone. He was no woodsman or tracker. He could scarcely have told which were fresh and which were old. Finally he stopped. Bearing off to the left, through trampled brush, were the marks where the carcass had been dragged into the clearing.

Almost reluctantly, the shotgun crooked under his arm, Macklyn followed the trail into the clearing. The carcass was still there, but there was less of it. Something had been there to feed on it. He looked slowly around to the spot where he had been sitting when last night's adventure had begun. It struck his fancy that the clearing was like an amphitheater, and that he'd had the perfect box seat.

He stood there trying to think. It was hard to arrive at anything like an accurate estimate of the time that had been involved in his duel with the dog. He had rushed down into the clearing and had stood for a moment facing the dog; then the dog had started his advance and he had blundered off to the left,

crashed into the tree, started up again, and the dog had jumped on his back. He had fallen again, stunned the dog with the gun butt, and then climbed the tree. There had been what seemed an endless wait for help. But trying to be clear-headed about it, he realized the whole sequence might not have taken more than twenty minutes, half an hour at the most. In that time the murderer had removed the body and brought back the carcass of the calf. The body *had* to be somewhere close by! There hadn't been time to take it any distance.

It was just then that Macklyn heard the sharp crack of a rifle and the whine of a bullet. To his astonishment he was suddenly bareheaded. He bent down to pick up his hat and saw that a bullet hole had been made neatly through the crown.

"Hey!" Macklyn shouted.

The gun cracked again, and Macklyn felt a faint, searing pain in his left shoulder. Open-mouthed, he stared at the hole in the sleeve of his coat. Then he dived for safety.

Twice more he heard the gun crack. Then, running bent over, he charged back along the trail toward the road.

As he approached it, suddenly he saw a figure standing there, gun poised. It was Digger March.

"You crazy son of a —" Macklyn shouted. "What are you doing?"

"If you can't hunt any more carefully than that, I ought to blow a

hole in you," Digger said angrily.

"What are you talking about?"

"You put a bullet right through my hat," Digger said. "You missed blowing my brains out by an inch."

"Look at this!" Macklyn said, waving his own hat. "Anyhow, this is a shotgun I'm carrying."

Digger March moistened his lips. "Me too," he said.

Both men turned and looked back into the woods. There was no sound except the rustling of dead leaves.

After a minute, Macklyn spoke. "Are you satisfied now?" he asked Digger.

"Satisfied?"

"That there's a killer in these woods."

Digger stared at Macklyn for a moment, and then he threw back his head and laughed. "My dear Macklyn, you've surely got that on the brain. That was some crazy kid. They've heard about the bag of dogs last night, and now the woods are full of 'em. He probably didn't even see us."

"You think that shooting was accidental?" Macklyn asked, rubbing the spot on his upper arm where the bullet had grazed him.

"Of course," Digger said. "And let's get out of here before we get some more of it."

They walked in silence back along the logging road. Finally Digger glanced sideways at Macklyn. "You out here hunting for evidence, Macklyn?" he asked.

"Yes," Macklyn said. "What were you out here for, Digger?"

Digger smiled sheepishly. "I didn't even see a live dog last night, let alone get a shot at one. There are supposed to be three or four left. I thought maybe they might still be attracted by what was left of the calf. I should have known there'd be dozens of other people with the same idea. That's what happened, you know. They heard movement in the clearing—you—and just blazed away without waiting to see what it was."

"You seem positive of that."

"Of course I'm positive."

They came out into the open near the apple tree embraced by the bittersweet vine. A jeep which had not been there before was now parked a few steps away, near the edge of the woods. Digger laughed. "More than one guy had the same idea," he said. "That's Van's jeep."

Macklyn drew a deep breath. "I cut across here for the Crowder place," he explained.

"Be seeing you," Digger said. "I go that way. My car's over there on the highway. Be seeing you."

Macklyn moved slowly over the rise of the hill and waited there until he was sure Digger was out of sight. Then he retraced his steps, walked over to Van Anderson's jeep, got in, and settled down to wait for its owner.

It was more than half an hour before Van Anderson came striding out of the woods, gun tucked un-

der his arm. Presently he saw Macklyn sitting in the jeep, and he came on at a slightly slower pace. Macklyn saw that the gun was a repeating rifle, such as Van had used to kill the dog last night.

"Hi," Van said. "You waiting for me or just resting?"

"Waiting for you."

Van laid his gun down on an Army blanket in the back of the jeep, after emptying the chamber. Then he climbed in behind the wheel. "Something special on your mind?" he asked.

Macklyn noticed how tightly the skin was drawn over Van's thin, ascetic face. His brown eyes were deepset and seemed always to contain the threat of a brewing storm. Macklyn took off his hat, rested it on his knee, and turned it slowly around with his fingers. Van saw the hole in the crown and whistled.

"I got it a little less than an hour ago up there in the clearing."

"Those crazy kids! The woods are full of them," Van said.

"I didn't see a soul except Digger March—and now you," Macklyn said.

"Macklyn! You don't think—"

"Why is everybody so anxious for me to drop this murder business, Van?"

"Murder business? My dear fellow, you're not still clinging to the idea you saw a man there?"

"I'm still clinging to it. It's true."

Van reached down and turned the starter key on the jeep. He had

to raise his voice to be heard over the motor. "If you enjoy it—"

Quietly Macklyn reached down and turned off the key. "You were the only hunter anywhere near the clearing when I needed help last night," he said.

Van stared at him. "What?"

"You were hunting alone. You could have moved the body before you came to save me. No one else appeared for quite a while."

Van's lips drew together in a thin, hard line. "Don't touch that key again or I'll break your arm," he said. "And don't say what you just said to me or anyone else again, or I'll take you apart piece by piece."

"You haven't answered my question," Macklyn said stubbornly.

Van shook his head slowly. His anger seemed to have suddenly evaporated under the absurdity of Macklyn's question. "You'd rather be right than be President, wouldn't you, Macklyn? You could get to be quite a nuisance with these irresponsible accusations of yours. Now suppose we talk about the weather while I drive you home."

Van let Macklyn out at the entrance to the Crowder place. Macklyn was walking across the yard toward the house when he saw Bob Streeter sitting on a stool in front of the barn, cleaning a rifle. He went over to him. The farmer looked up.

"First chance I've had to clean this since last night," he said.

"Bob, you know the woods around that clearing pretty well."

"Ought to. Lived here all my life."

"Are there any caves, anything like that?"

"Not what you'd call caves," Bob said, running the cloth through the barrel of his gun. "Might have called them that when we were kids. Just sort of openings between rocks."

"Places big enough to hide a body?"

Bob rubbed the calloused tips of his fingers over his jaw. "Might be."

"How about going out there with me after lunch? It would save me a lot of time if you could take me to the places where anything could be hidden."

Bob closed one eye and squinted with the other through the gun barrel. He seemed satisfied. "I guess I could," he said. "Have to be back around four for my chores. Start around two, we could pretty well cover places."

"That'll be fine," Macklyn said.

The farmer's pale-blue eyes lifted. "What happened to your hat?"

"The woods are full of kids hunting for wild dogs," Macklyn said.

Bob grunted. "I should have warned you. That there was close."

Sunday dinner wasn't quite so happy as it might have been. Lib was beginning to be worried. Macklyn hadn't meant to tell her about his narrow escape, but he had care-

lessly left his hat on the bench in the front hall, and young Dicky found it straight off and brought it in with excited questions.

When Lib and Macklyn were alone she said, "You don't think it was an accident, do you?"

Macklyn smiled at her. "You're going to be tough to live with," he said, "what with all that intuition."

"Macklyn, give it up. You've done everything you could."

"I'm going back this afternoon." "No!"

"With Bob." He leaned across the table and covered her hand with his. "I'm getting to think like a private eye," he said, grinning. "I think I'm being scared off, darling, but I don't think anybody is going to kill me. That would indicate I was right, and there'd be a murder investigation on in earnest."

"I don't want you dead just so that the police will get interested," Lib said unhappily. "It *must* have been an accident. Digger was shot at too."

Macklyn frowned. "Digger *says* he was shot at. He says someone put a bullet right through his hat, the way they did through mine. But I've been thinking, Lib. I never saw the hat."

"He probably ran when it happened and just left the hat."

"Probably," Macklyn said. At 2 o'clock sharp Macklyn met Bob Streeter in front of the house. Sorrowful, the beagle, was excitedly running in circles, but Bob had

other ideas. He spoke to Dicky, who was watching from the porch with Lib.

"I'm going to put Sorrow in the milkhouse, Dicky," Bob said, "and don't you let him out till we get back. He's liable to get hurt up in the woods with all those crazy kids hunting for dogs."

So Sorrowful was taken off to the milkhouse and left there, protesting with loud wails. Then Macklyn and Bob set out across country to the logging road and into the woods.

"Used to help haul timber out of here when I was a kid," Bob said cheerfully. "My father was a teamster. Used to have a six-horse hitch to pull the big stuff out. Drag it right along the snow. I used to ride astride one of the lead horses, hanging onto the harness . . ." Macklyn had never heard Bob so loquacious. ". . . sittin' there on a log, filling my pipe, with my gun laying right alongside, when I heard a rustling in the bushes. I slipped my pipe into my pocket and reached out real quiet for my gun. Then out of the bushes came Mister Partridge, a-strutting across the road. Well, I upped with my gun, and brother! Did the feathers fly!"

"Isn't that the turnoff for the clearing?" Macklyn interrupted.

"Thought you wanted to circle round the possible hiding places, Mr. Graves. There's another turn-off just above this to higher ground."

"But oughtn't we to stop and

listen for some of these hunters?"

Bob chuckled. "When you're hunting, Mr. Graves, you move as quiet as you can. When you're not hunting you make yourself heard so's no one will mistake you for something else. Why do you think I been shooting off my mouth so much for? There may be wild dogs in these woods, but there ain't any that talk that I know of."

There was no doubt about Bob's knowing the woods. In the space of half an hour he showed Macklyn at least a dozen places where a body could have been hidden, but hadn't. They climbed up and down banks, over rocks, peered into crevices.

"Course I'm showing you places it could be hidden, Mr. Graves, but we already know in advance it ain't, because the snow ain't been marked up hardly any, even by hunters."

Macklyn looked slowly around with a strange feeling of excitement. "Bob, where's the clearing from here?"

"Just over that rise there," Bob said, gesturing with his pipe.

"I'd like to look," Macklyn said.

"No use," Bob said. "It's a straight drop down. No place to hide anything."

"All the same I'd like to look."

He climbed up the rise of ground and looked down the other side. A swampy bog stretched out in front of him. There was no sign of the clearing. Macklyn turned back.

Bob leaned against a spruce tree, pulling on his pipe.

Macklyn went straight up to him. "Bob, I'm not an unreasonable man," he said quietly. "I haven't got it in for anyone. I don't know who was killed, and I don't know who killed him. It's simply a matter of common justice that something should be done about it."

"I agree," Bob said. "It's a matter of justice. We got to live by the law, or we got nothing left."

"Then why have you deliberately led me *away* from the clearing—*away* from places where a body could be hidden?"

"Why the clearing's right over that rise," Bob said.

"It isn't, and you know it isn't."

"Well, I'll be darned," Bob said. "Must have got off the track."

"You know every inch of this ground, Bob. You've taken me directly to a dozen hiding places where you knew I wouldn't find anything. Why?"

The pale-blue eyes avoided Macklyn's. "I guess I just got 'lost."

"We might as well head back for home," Macklyn said, after a moment.

"Anything you want, Mr. Graves."

Macklyn couldn't sleep. It had been a bad evening, after Lib had heard his story of Bob Streeter's deliberate attempt to lead him off the trail. She had depended on Bob more than Macklyn realized.

"He was the tenant farmer here for the people that owned the place before Lucian bought it," she had told him. "Lucian thought highly of him, and he's a wonderful worker—actually makes money for me and for himself off the place. After Lucian died I turned to him, almost as I might have to a member of the family. He's been wonderful with Dicky. I've never felt a moment's fear at living here alone. I've always had the feeling I could depend on him."

"Nonetheless," Macklyn had said, "He didn't want me to find what I was looking for."

"It's incredible."

"The whole business is incredible," Macklyn had said. "I have the uneasy feeling that Bob isn't alone in trying to steer me away from this. Why? Why?"

There was no answer, not even a far-fetched one, that Macklyn could make sense out of. They had gone to bed fairly early, all of them still hung-over with fatigue from the previous night's excitement. Macklyn had thought he could sleep, but he couldn't. He lay in bed, tossing and turning, lighting an occasional cigarette. It was just before midnight that he heard someone moving in the yard outside his window. He jumped up and looked out into the moonlit night.

Bob Streeter, gun crooked under his arm, was walking briskly across the yard toward the gap—toward the logging road.

Macklyn felt himself begin to tremble from head to foot. Somehow he knew this was it. Bob was going to the hiding place he had so carefully avoided during the afternoon. Macklyn's first impulse was to call out to him, but he checked himself, realizing that if Bob knew he'd been seen, they'd be involved once more in evasions. Macklyn knew his one chance to solve this puzzle was to follow Bob. But he knew that by the time he'd got dressed, Bob would be gone.

Then Macklyn thought of Sorrowful. He got dressed as quickly as he could and tiptoed down the hall to the door of Dicky's room and opened the door softly. Dicky was sound asleep, curled into a round ball under his eider down quilt. Macklyn heard a thumping noise on the floor, and the light from the hall showed Sorrowful, lying on the scatter rug beside the bed, wagging his tail in greeting. Macklyn whispered to him, and Sorrowful came cheerfully out into the hall. Macklyn closed the door, praying that Lib had heard nothing.

Sorrowful's leash hung in the coat closet in the hall, and Macklyn attached it to the beagle's collar. Then they slipped out together.

The dog jogged briskly along at Macklyn's side. Bob had trained him well. It wasn't until they had reached the field, where the apple tree stood, that Macklyn led the dog over to the fresh tracks Bob had left in the snow.

"Go ahead, Sorrow. Find Bob," he said. "Find him."

Instantly Sorrowful lowered his sensitive nose to the trail, tugging on the leash as he forged ahead. The dog went straight to the logging road and along the path that was quite familiar to Macklyn by now. But about a hundred yards from the turnoff to the bloody clearing, the little hound broke away to the right. Macklyn was instantly aware of a new trail, a trail made by the snow tires of a car.

Sorrow was moving fast now, his tail wagging vigorously. Then up ahead, through the trees, Macklyn saw a parked jeep. It wasn't Van Anderson's; that had been a dark green. This was a light color.

Then Sorrowful barked joyfully. Instantly, from around the other side of the jeep, Bob Streeter appeared, his gun poised. Sorrowful's delight was boundless. He pulled Macklyn forward.

Bob didn't speak or move until the puppy reached him and clawed happily at his trouser leg. Macklyn was the distance of the leash away. "So you followed me, Mr. Graves," Bob said:

"Yes."

The farmer reached down and scratched Sorrowful's head. "A good dog. He's going to be a fine dog, if he's kept in training."

"He's fond of you," Macklyn said. "He came to you, straight as an arrow."

Bob Streeter lifted his head, and

the gun barrel rose too so that it was aimed straight at Macklyn's chest. "You'd better take him home, Mr. Graves."

"I'm sorry, Bob, I've come this far and I'm not turning back. If you're threatening me with that gun, you're going to have to use it."

The farmer stood there staring at him, uncertain.

Then another voice spoke from the far side of the jeep, and Macklyn felt as though his heart would dissolve in his chest. "You're a hard guy to discourage, baby." Fred Fowler said. "Bring him around here, Bob."

Bob Streeter motioned with the gun. Macklyn walked close to him, and to his astonishment he saw in the moonlight that the farmer was crying.

Fred Fowler was not dressed for the woods. He had on his city clothes, overcoat and hat. The inevitable cigarette dangled from his lips, and he tried to smile at Macklyn, but it was a shaky attempt. At Fowler's feet something bulky lay under an Army blanket. Without asking, Macklyn knew that it was the body.

"Brace yourself and take a look," Fred said.

Macklyn hesitated, and then he bent down and pulled back the blanket. The throat of the corpse had been mangled by the dog, but the man was clearly recognizable, even in the halflight of the moon.

"*Lucian!*" Macklyn whispered.

It was Lucian Crowder who had died two years ago in a plane accident over Long Island Sound—Lucian Crowder, who had *not* died two years ago in a plane accident over Long Island Sound.

Fred Fowler's voice was a tired monotone. "You know how I felt when I saw him—alive," he said.

Macklyn had turned away. He felt as if he had been slugged in the stomach.

Fred's voice went on: "He appeared out of the night at Digger March's three days ago, smiling, self-confident. He wanted Digger to go to Lib and break the news that good old, charming old Lucian was not dead after all. He wanted us to tell her that good old, charming old Lucian had been suffering from amnesia for two years, but now he was all right and ready to return to the loving bosom of his family."

"Amnesia," Macklyn whispered.

"Amnesia, my foot!" Fred said harshly. "Good old, charming old Lucian had just walked out on Lib and you and his life. Because why? Because he was bored with it. Because he didn't like monogamy. Because after he had enjoyed the only lady of loose morals in this community and most of them in New York, he wanted to find fresher fields. Good old, charming old Lucian's finances had seemed remarkably low when he died, but

the truth was he'd been more frugal than we knew. He'd set aside a considerable sum of money for this moment. So he took off—Mexico, he said. The plane wreck was a fake, staged like the showman he was. To hell with his wife and his child, to hell with his business associates."

"He told you this?" Macklyn asked, incredulous.

"He told us," Fred said. "How he'd prepared his finances for the disappearance. How he'd crash-landed his plane near a deserted strip of Connecticut beach. How he'd left it to be pounded to pieces against a submerged reef when the tide rose. He told us everything—all about the lush, degenerate life he'd led after that, all with a kind of relish. And he made it clear why he had come back."

"Why?"

"For money," Fred said grimly. "He knew that Digger was in love with Lib. He knew that I was in love with Lib. He suspected that you were in love with Lib. One of us, he said, ought to think it worthwhile to pay him to disappear again—to keep him from making his past a public scandal that would crucify Lib and mess Dicky up by revealing a story the boy could never forget or live down. It was a neat little frame-up, baby. We could tell him to go to hell, and he would reappear. He could tell his amnesia story, and unless we chose to rake up the filth, Lib would have

to take him back. If we fought him, with the truth, Lib would have to face that, and Dicky would too. It would, he said, be so much nicer for Lib if he just continued to be dead—at a price, of course."

Fred drew a deep breath. "I don't think I ever hated a man so much. I hit him. I hit him with everything I had, and when he came staggering back, I hit him again. He went over backward, and his head hit the big table in the center of the library. I reached over to yank him up to his feet again, with Digger trying to pull me off him. But he was dead, Macklyn. The corner of that table smashed in his skull. I hadn't meant to kill him, baby. But he was dead, and I know I was glad Lib and Dicky were safe.

"But after Digger and I had talked a bit, we realized they weren't safe. We would call in the doctor, Lucian would be declared dead, and then the whole filthy story would have to come out. I might get away with self-defense, but the story would come out. While we were still talking about it, Van Anderson came in. Another black page in the saga of good old Lucian was revealed. It needn't be told, beyond saying there is a connection between Van's wife's retirement from the world and good old, charming old Lucian."

"So we made a decision. You must be the judge, Macklyn, whether or not it was wrong. We decided no one need ever know

that Lucian had come back to life. We decided to dispose of the body and keep the secret." Fred's mirthless laugh sounded again: "Have you ever tried to dispose of a body, Macklyn? We needed help, and we went to the one person we could think of who, in his way, loved Lib and Dicky as much as we did—Bob Streeter. More of the saga of Lucian! Bob had always known Lucian's true stripe. He knew about Van's wife and the other local lady, who shall be nameless. He'd even thought at one time of taking the law into his own hands. He was willing to help and he had an idea—the dogs."

Macklyn's fists were so tightly clenched his hands were cramped. It seemed he couldn't bear the the harsh sound of Fred's voice any longer.

"Bob convinced us," Fred said, "that the dogs would destroy Lucian's body beyond recognition. No one would be looking for Lucian, because Lucian was supposed to have died two years ago. Even if the body was ever found, it would be an unsolved mystery. And so we became conspirators, and we got the body out here the night of the hunt, and we left it in the clearing after the hunters had scattered. Van stayed behind to create a diversion in case stragglers turned up too soon. You, Macklyn! You who might very well have joined our conspiracy if you'd known the truth. As a result of the accident of

your coming into the woods, you have pressed us and pressed us until we have lost. The dogs would no longer serve the purpose. They were dead. The woods were no longer a safe hiding place because of your insistent prying. We had to wait until tonight to remove the body, and now, finally, you have beaten us."

The woods were still except for the sound of Sorrowful's snuffling.

"Now, Macklyn, you must decide," Fred said. "You must decide whether murder has been done in a legal sense. You must decide whether our conspiracy to save Dicky and Lib from learning the truth about Lucian is worth preserving—can be preserved. Nothing can bring Lucian back. The only thing that can be accomplished is public exposure of a degenerate and vicious past. I think I could beat the rap. It's for you to decide if I must give myself up as a murderer. And whether Bob and Digger and Van must give themselves up as accomplices after the fact."

Macklyn couldn't speak.

Fred's mouth twisted in a wry smile. "You may wonder why the police didn't find the body this morning. They didn't know the woods here, Macklyn, and they asked for help from a man who did. Bob directed their search, as he directed yours this afternoon. When you came out here this morning, Bob followed you. He was the one who shot at you. It happens

that he's the best marksman in the country. If he had wanted to kill you, you can rest assured you would be dead. He wanted to frighten you away. Digger helped with the illusion by pretending he'd been shot at too. Anything to get you away—because we were preparing good old, charming old Lucian for his removal tonight."

Macklyn's stomach was a cold knot, and his mind was a confusion of thoughts.

"The mad, exasperating thing about this, baby, is that you *didn't* hear and see what you thought you heard and saw. Lucian had been dead for two days when we put his body in the clearing. He *didn't* cry out. The sound you heard must have come from the dog. And he *didn't* thrash out with his arm to protect himself, as you insisted. The dog moved him, and his arm, stiff in rigor mortis, flailed out in some way. Your imagination *was* working overtime, Macklyn. God, if only we could have convinced you!"

Still Macklyn couldn't speak. "And the fresh blood." Fred laughed, and it was a despairing sound. "It *was* your own blood, Macklyn."

Macklyn put one hand over his eyes.

"Remember one thing, baby," Fred said, and he suddenly sounded enormously tired. "If you decide that my blow was responsible, in the eyes of the law, for Lucian's death and that I am a murderer, I will take what's coming to me. But remember, Digger and Van and Bob were not protecting me. They wouldn't have covered up for me for an instant. It was always *Lib* they were thinking about—*Lib* and *Dicky*. Lucian deserved to die and he was dead, and nothing they could do would bring him back. They thought only of what the whole truth would mean to *Lib* and *Dicky*. It's for you to decide what shall become of us, Macklyn. You and you alone."

"God help me!" Macklyn said. And it was a prayer.

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